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NO. 35

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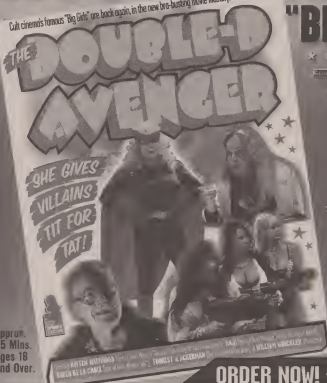
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Editor-in-chief

Buddy Barnett
Editor /Special Projects

Forrest J Ackerman
Contributing Editor

Terry Pace
Contributing Editor
East Coast

Mike Malloy
Layout Artist

Paul Liu
Art Consultant

Coco Kiyonaga
Creative Consultant

Guy Mariner Tucker
Japanese Film Consultant

This issue dedicated to Mabel Langdon.

Special Thanks to:

Frank Dello Stritto, Harry Langdon, Jr. & Harry Langdon III, Curtis Herrington, Yvette Vickers, Belle G. Lugosi, Kevin Thomas, Gino Colbert, Bob Chinn, Mike & Lisa Vraney, Dave Friedman, Frank Dietz, Male Nanni, Professor Christopher Freyling, Ken Schacter, John Morris, Charles Heard, Ron Bost of Hollywood Movie Poster, Tom Weaver, Fred Owen Ray, Eric Caiden of Hollywood Book and Poster, Ed & Caroline Plumb, Gary Don Rhodes, Jen Henderson, Sara Karloff, Greg Mank, Brad Lineweaver, Merlo Toland, Christine Ortiz, David DeVilb, Dave Stevens, Reven White, Katherine Orison, Michael F. Blake, Lisa Mitchell, Mike Weatherford, Verne Langdon and James Warren

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Manufactured in the United States of America

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We Got Mail! letters to the editor

Regarding *Mummies for Daummies* in issue #34, Dan Mankowski fails to mention Kharis going on to a successful football career in the 60s with the Detroit Lions, and playing Mongo in Mel Brooks' *Blazing Saddles*. (Applause)

But no kidding folks, I greatly enjoyed that article, and it's about time the Mummy sequels got some critical attention. To me, the flimsy plausibility of Kharis parading through the Louisiana bayou, or the brown hills in back of Universal, does not destroy their sense of gothic horror (any more than the German villagers in *Frankenstein* becoming some kind of unidentifiable mid-Balkans by the forties). And it was a long wait for those films on commercial video and laser. I limped along with fourth generation video copies at SLP for many years.

Walk like an Egyptian.

Lee Harris Kharis

Gordon Shriver's book-length article on Boris Karloff in CM#34 is a stunning piece of work which truly captures the essence of the man as well as the actor. It is the best and most moving tribute to Karloff that I have read. It also fills in many gaps in his pre-Frankenstein days which were always present in other biographies. The research is prodigious. I hope that Shriver will not be offended if I offer one or two corrections and add some personal observations.

The original director of *The Mask of Fu Manchu* was not King Vidor but Charles Vidor, a young Hungarian emigre who was just starting his Hollywood career. He is best remembered today for a series of lavish films starring Rita Hayworth that he made at Columbia in the 1940s including *Coer Girl*, *You Never Were Lovelier*, *The Loves of Carmen* and of course *Gilda*.

I had a brief association with Charles Vidor in 1953. He told me that he was fired from *The Mask of Fu Manchu* because he wanted it to be a straight horror film and MGM insisted it should be an action/adventure story along serial lines with a tongue-in-cheek attitude. Vidor spoke highly of Karloff's infinite patience and co-operation in the early days of shooting, particularly in scenes that he had to play with a very large and heavy snake which gave off a noxious smell under the heat of the studio's arc lamps.

Boris's own account of the making of *The Mummy* varied somewhat from the reminiscence of Bramwell Fletcher. During our making of *The Haunted Strangler*, he told me that Carl Laemmle Jr. and director Karl

Freund almost came to blows over the opening sequence. Laemmle wanted the mummy to come to life and be introduced in a series of stylized close-ups like those that James Whale used in *Frankenstein*. Freund insisted that the mummy should not be shown at all after its first stirrings of life in the sarcophagus and that audiences would be far more horrified by the spectacle of Fletcher's siccant into madness, and his maniacal laughter, if they didn't see what drove him to it. Fortunately Freund prevailed and the sequence is one of the most revered in Universal's horror classics.

Karloff's break from horror in *The Lost Patrol* and *The House of Rothschild* did indeed impress the critics but *Rothschild* was made for United Artists, not for MGM. Meanwhile, Boris had also made a triumphant visit to England, his first since achieving international fame, and was starred by Gaumont-British in *The Ghoul*, a horror film with its tongue firmly in its cheek which also featured Ralph Richardson, Cedric Hardwicke and Ernest Thesiger in the cast. Several years later, he returned to England to star in Gaumont-British's *The Man Who Changed His Mind*. It was described by Shriver as *The Man Who Lived Again* which was its American release title because the distributors felt that audiences here would not appreciate the irony of its original title. It co-starred John Loder and Anna Lee (who was re-united with Boris years later in *Bedlam*). During that second visit, Karloff also starred in a forgettable British "B" movie called *Juggernaut*.

Shriver was absolutely right in his appraisal of Monogram's tepid Mr. Wong detective series. It was consistently mediocre except for Karloff's sensitive portrayal of the Chinese detective, but the studio made up for it partially by giving us also the interesting Karloff starrer *The Ape*. It is worth noting that, between *The Mask of Fu Manchu* and Mr. Wong, Boris also appeared as a Chinese warlord in the Warner Brothers production *West of Shanghai*.

One of Karloff's most underrated films is *The Devil Commands*, from his mad doctor series at Columbia, and based upon William Sloane's novel "The Edge of Running Water". It was directed by Edward Dmytryk whose subsequent involvement with the investigation into Un-American Activities in Hollywood kept it off the screen for a number of years. Karloff's performance as a scientist trying to communicate with his dead wife was one of his best.

Robert Wise's recollection of Karloff and Lugosi working together in harmony during the making of *The Body Snatcher* was echoed to me personally by Bela on one of the rare occasions when he would speak about their relationship. It helps to dispel the myth of their feud in the 1930s which was created by Laemmle Jr. as a publicity stunt. Boris always respected Lugosi and felt sorry for Bela's personal demons that destroyed his career. Lugosi respected Karloff's virtuosity as an actor although he envied him for his greater success.

Both men shared certain qualities, among them great loyalty to those who had helped them and a willingness to help others. Bela gave my brother and me the opportunity to represent him. A few years later, Boris was instrumental in launching my career as a producer by giving me a script called "Stranglehold" that he owned and offering to come to England to star in it if I succeeded in setting it up. This became *The Haunted Strangler*.

I am fascinated by Shriver's account of the battle between Maurice Evans and J.B. Priestly over the casting of Karloff in "The Linden Tree" on Broadway. Years later, when Evans was starring in "Dial M For Murder" on the stage, he proposed that Boris should take on the role of the Scotland Yard detective when the show went on the road. This time he was dissuaded by his partners who argued that audiences around the country, seeing Karloff's name on the posters, would come to the theatre expecting him to be the villain and be disappointed when it was not so. Alan Napier was signed for the role instead. This was told to me by Anthony Dawson during the production of *The Haunted Strangler* in which I cast him as a Scotland Yard detective. He had played the hired assassin in *Dial M For Murder* on both stage and screen. Karloff never mentioned it.

Corridors of Blood was a film that neither Boris nor I set out to make. MGM, who were distributing *The Haunted Strangler*, suggested we make a second film and proposed a color and Cinemascope version of *Dracula*. Boris was enthused about the idea and we had a screenplay written. Then MGM discovered that Stoker's book was not yet in the public domain and belonged to Universal. We needed to find another script in a hurry because Boris had limited time available in England due to a prior commitment in Hollywood. John Croydon came up with a story called "The Doctor From Seven Dials" which we re-titled *Corridors of Blood*. The irony of the situation was that meanwhile Universal teamed with Hammer to make *Dracula* in color with Christopher Lee who had by then played a cameo role for me in *Corridors of Blood*. A perfect example of "six degrees of

separation?"

I hope that Gordon Shriver will be encouraged to expand his article so that it can eventually be published as a book.

Richard Gordon
New York, NY

I want to thank everyone about the kind words I've been hearing about my new book, *Vampire Over London - Bela Lugosi in Britain*. I do think Lugosi's 1951 stage tour of "Dracula" is an important part of his life story. My co-author Andi Brooks and I have been fortunate to document his and Lillian's 8 months in Britain in some detail.

Andi, who lives in Bath, England, was not mentioned in the early publicity for the book, but I want to stress to *Cult Movies* magazine readers that he is a full co-author of the book. The original idea to research Lugosi's three trips to Britain (1935, 1939 and 1951) was Andi's and he was well along in the project before I became involved. By then, Andi had interviewed three cast members of the *Dracula* company, as well as a few crew members from 1939's *Mystery of the Mary Celeste* and 1939's *Dark Eyes of London*. Working together, we tracked down six more people who worked on the theatre tour, and Dora Bryan, who so-starred in *Mother Riley Meets The Vampire*. With their help and that of Richard Gordon (Lugosi's friend and agent in 1951) in New York, we put together a rich personal side of the story. While I did most of the library work, documenting the hard facts of Lugosi's time in England, Andi covered Britain with a letter writing campaign to locate anyone who met Lugosi in 1951. Dozens of people who watched "Dracula" on stage responded. Thanks to Andi, a radio talk show in Belfast solicited listeners for their memories, and retrieved for us a golden memory that is one of the most amusing anecdotes in the book.

A critical moment of 1951 came late in the tour, when Bela suffered an attack of sciatica onstage, in the third act of the play. It was the second performance of the night and he was already exhausted. The pain almost crippled him, but he stayed in character and finished the performance. The audience never knew; but the actor playing Renfield realized how much he was suffering. We were lucky enough to find several people who were at that performance, and tell of the incident from a number of viewpoints.

The pain, and the painkillers he simply had to use, figure in the saga of 1951. After six months of working together, members of the "Dracula" company had very few secrets from each other. Bela's ailments and how he dealt with them are but part of the larger context of day-to-day life on a gruelling tour. He knew the tour was his last real chance at a comeback. The comeback

failed; the tour never made it to London's West End. But for week after week in the British provinces, Bela gave performances that many people recall today as spellbinding. Our book has their stories. We wish that Lugosi's farewell stage performances as *Dracula* would have been on a grander stage, but he never let the modesty or grandeur of his surroundings affect his acting. We have been inspired by that noble ethic in telling his story.

Frank Dello Stritto
Houston, TX

I'm writing you to explain why I won't be renewing my subscription to *Cult Movies*. I simply refuse to support rabid right-wingers. It isn't as if the political ravings contribute anything to the magazine. They consist mostly of insults and unsupported inflammatory statements.

Either the publisher doesn't care what's happening, or he agrees with the sentiments. I feel it must be the latter, so I'm terminating my relationship with him, and his magazine.

James W. McKelvey
Santa Clarita, CA

Let me explain that I consider your magazine incomparable but, to quote Eli Wallach in *Godfather III*, I have a stone in my shoe and it has to do with Joe Wawrzniak's review of *The Hitcher* in issue 34. I have yet to read a single convincing essay or book outlining just why the 1980's were particularly brutal or selfish, be it socially, politically or economically.

The red scare and Jim Crow prevailed through the '50s. The drug culture was born of the '60s. And the '70s were marked by unprecedented inflation and mindless dance-till-you-drop disco. (How about *I Spit On Your Grave* as movie of the decade?) Further, all of these decades were marked by wars in Korea, Cambodia or Vietnam. What records exist suggest that philanthropic contributions increased in the 1980's compared to the previous decade. I think it was Norman Mailer who used the term "factoid" to define something repeated so often that it goes unquestioned. Well, I think that the factoid of the heartless '80s is overdue for debunking.

Personally, some of the best days of my life took place in the glorious 1980's and I am just selfish enough that I would love to live them all over again! And yes, there were some great movies (*Godfather III* excluded).

I ask you. Is there a single excess in that period that we have not experienced in triplicate in the '90s? Let's see. We have had domestic terrorist bombings, Nasdaq paper prosperity, the burning of the Branch Dividians, political correctness, presidential

scandals, rap/porn misogyny and celebrity murderers buying their freedom with high priced attorneys. Nothing "gut wrenching" or "soul destroying" there, eh Joe?

Clay Marceaux
Port Arthur, TX

I've just read Buddy Barnett's commentary in the most recent *Cult Movies*, and felt compelled to write and salute you for your observations.

Although I am aware that nearly every later generation has issues with its offspring (from Socrates on), I must say that the shallowness, lack of civility and ignorance of this latest crop is both startling and terrifying. The instant gratification that has characterized their upbringing and the marked indifference to anything that is not immediate (I work with two thirty year olds whose notion of a significant historical event is the season finale of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) is simply appalling. There just doesn't seem to be anything moving below the surface with this group, no sense of causation, no awareness of the ramification of ones actions, no aesthetic interest in anything that is either not commercially acceptable or is graced by a subtlety, elegance or intellectual craftsmanship.

Like you, I was lucky enough to grow up in an era that offered a variety of stimuli culled from different eras, viewpoints and philosophies. Although I watched my TV Guide each week with slavish devotion for the next airing of *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* and *The Thing*, and practically camped out daily at the local magazine store for the arrival of the latest issue of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, I also read the books that children had for decades, from "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" to Jules Verne and Jack London, appreciated all films and the potential wonders of live theatre. I played baseball, was interested in early rock by an older brother, classical from my Dad, jazz from an uncle. I later endorsed a lot of sixties politics, but still understood how to give my seat up to an old lady or pregnant woman on a bus. Until recently, I seemed able to converse with most generations and types. I liked to think of myself as fairly eclectic, a guy well versed in books, film, politics and the box scores. Now, however, I find myself surrounded by people who think rap is good music, who are glued to cell phones that they abuse in restaurants and bookstores, who can talk of nothing but the latest film and computer software or their tattoos (and of course, themselves).

For all my apparent obsolescence, however, I can only say that like you I am thankful I grew up when I did, that my experiences, cultural intellectual and

socially, were diverse and opened me up to a more engaging, multifaceted and exciting world. I pity these people, but from what I have seen, they have achieved an unsettling sort of satisfaction in their apathy, ignorance and cultural myopia.

Bruce Dettman
San Francisco, CA

In the recent *Dracula 2000*, they gave *Dracula* a richer history. Not only was he Vlad Tepes, but he was Judas, the man who betrayed Jesus Christ. *Dracula* has commingled with many other cult icons, including Buffy, Spider Man, Batman, Abbott and Costello, Sherlock Holmes, Hardy Boys, Indiana Jones, etc. Who hasn't he crossed over with?

I'm loving your recent series of interviews with the cast and company of Lugosi's British *Dracula* tour of 1951. Lugosi was a man bigger than life. I don't feel there will ever be a better *Dracula* than the one Bela played. He fell into Stoker's role to perfection.

My wife Patricia and son Jason both read your magazine. My son and I went to the Arco Arena to see WWF Judgement Day -

MTV's Sunday Night Heat live. The next day my son and wife went to Memorial Auditorium to see Prince in person. After we got our hands on the latest *Cult Movies* we decided that your stuff was better material than the live shows that we saw. Your magazine is real classic entertainment.

Paul Dale Roberts
Elk Grove, CA
www.jazmaonline.com

In CM #34 the covers (both inside and out) were beautiful. I hope you will have more color posters in future issues. I have never seen the one sheet from *You'll Find Out* before. Speaking of which, maybe you should do a feature on Kay Kyser and his career.

H. Pfeffer
Bronx, NY

I'm sick of fandom and I wanted you to know. It's just disgusting. The collectors hate all the dealers because they get price-gouged all the time. The dealers hate the collectors because they won't pay the pocket picking dealers the outrageous prices. The critics hate the movie going public because nobody really takes critics seriously,

especially now that studios like Sony can just dream up a movie critic out of thin air and have a true, in every sense of the word *Nobody* reviewing the latest films. The public hates the critics because they think these guys have a *Life of Riley*, getting paid to do nothing but watch movies all day. Most fan magazines (except yours) tend to hate their readership, filling their pages up with gossip about how cheap, or gay, or weird, or smelly the other fans are, and what idiots they made of themselves at the last convention. Meanwhile, the cheap, gay, weird, smelly convention promoters are charging more at the door to get into their boring conventions, because more of us are staying home and doing fandom entirely on Ebay these days. Like me. It was fun for many years, and I'm going to miss all the above mentioned former friends of mine. Adios!

David Manning
Acme Syndicate News

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deep inside cult movies

On Saturday, the second day of our Cult Movies Convention last year, about the only down moment was hearing about Frederick S. Clarke. The news was spreading like wildfire that Fred had just killed himself. Depressed by several aspects of his life, among them the fact that the circulation of his *Cinefantastique* magazine had stagnated at around 30,000 readers, Fred traveled a half-hour's drive from his home and took his life via carbon monoxide inhalation.

Far beyond the fact that the circulation of our own *Cult Movies* magazine seems to have stagnated at around 30,000, this was a deeply disturbing piece of news. In all likelihood, I never would have become a film collector without Fred Clarke. And now he's gone.

My contact with Fred goes back to my high school days in Seattle, when another fan gave me an address for Fred and said he had movie posters for sale. At that time *Cinefantastique* was a poster service, and I started buying from him as soon as I set eyes on his catalog. I bought a *Godzilla* one-sheet, and one for *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, each for \$1.50. Each of these are now auction items that tend to sell for at least two thousand when you can find them. I got a complete lobby card set from *One Body Too Many* with Lugosi for twelve dollars. I also got *Psycho* and *The Birds* lobby cards at prices that were extremely reasonably priced. In terms of today's marketplace they'd be called give away prices.

Every so often Fred would send me a supplemental update to his main catalog, and I retained a good business relationship with him. Eventually I learned about other sources, such as the Movie Poster Service, in Canton, Oklahoma, which had older comedy posters I wanted. Once I found out about film memorabilia, I started thinking up more and more things I had to have.

One day in 1970 I got a letter from Fred Clarke asking me to go to my phone book, look in the yellow pages, and send Fred everything under the listing for Book and Magazine Distribution, along with any bookstores and newsstands I could find that might be interested in film magazines. He was starting up a new film periodical, and needed any helpful info I could provide. Surely he had people in every major city doing this same legwork. Did it indicate that I was his main customer in Seattle during this time? He told me that he'd send me a copy of his new magazine when it was printed. I had heard that *Cinefantastique* had at one time been a film review newsletter, but I'd never seen a copy of it.

So at age 22, Fred Clarke was setting up shop as a publisher, launching a film news magazine to compete with the majors, and be "THE magazine with a Sense of Wonder."

I sent him the information he wanted out of my Seattle phone book, and shortly after Fred sent me a fantastic present of art prints he'd published; oversized art prints of Christopher Lee drawn by Dave Ludwig as characters from his various films: *Dracula*, *Fu Manchu*, *Sherlock Holmes*, etc. And then some time after that, came the first issue of Fred's serious journal of film investigation. It bore a black and white cover showing Alan Arkin from *Catch-22*, and was filled with coverage of Stephen King's *Needful Things*, *The Tommyknockers*, *The Stand*, *The Dark Half*, and much more. The first print run was a grand total of one thousand copies. It was quickly re-printed to meet the demand. It was the beginning of a 32 year blaze of glory. Some filmmakers called *Cinefantastique* "the bible of the industry." It was the only serious, continuous, quality reporting on our kind of movies that this country



had ever seen.

Steven Jay Rubin, a frequent contributor to the magazine, explained the challenge Clarke established for his staff of writers. "He wasn't interested in whom Steve McQueen was dating, or what kind of chocolate Elizabeth Taylor liked, he wanted to know how John Chambers was going to handle the makeup on the new *Planet of the Apes* film and what Rod Serling was up to. His writers also reviewed films of all kinds." In other words, it was the first serious film magazine for the baby boom generation who had been starving for just such a rallying place.

Cinefantastique was consistently a thing of beauty, a publication to be proud of. Glorious glossy paper, beautiful four-color photos, sophisticated artistic layout have always made it a joy to hold and view. The editorial policy has always been focused and wide-ranging. It was as far away from our own magazine as it could possibly be with our obsessive, scattered interests, horrible black and white printing on the cheapest newsprint paper our printer can find.

So innovator Fred Clarke is gone. I never met Fred in person, in fact never heard the entire story about why he took his own life. But I can't help thinking about that part that he was depressed because the circulation of his amazing magazine had peaked out at 30,000. Had it ever been greater? When he started out he had no serious competition, whereas now the specialty stores are stocked to the rafters with spin-off zines, sub-genres, revivals of the old titles from the 1960s, and of course the internet provides more competition than we ever could have imagined a few decades ago.

How can a magazine publisher react to that? We've been thinking of printing *Cult Movies* in Cinemascope, 3-D, and Surround Sound to get a

few more readers taking a look.

Lots of film people have died in the past year or two. Way too many. My personal phone book is half filled with people who aren't alive anymore. But it's especially disturbing to hear of the originator of a film magazine, so frustrated by his own creation, that he decides the going is no longer worth the pain, checks out of this life, perhaps convinced he's taken the better way. Perhaps past caring.

Part of the pain could have been the glaring realization that there's just nowhere else to go. When everything Hollywood chums out is a ninety million dollar remake, sequel, or prequel. With every columnist wanting to critique the homosexual hairstyles in *Bride of Frankenstein*, calling that innovative journalism. And when you've just flat out printed all the pictures of Lugosi that every photographer took in this world. What the hell do you do for an encore? What filmzine publisher wouldn't decide that eternity is the only escape?

The true horror isn't a rakish wit like Ron Borst declaring, "I always thought 2001 was a movie, not a year." The chills begin with the realization that *Big Brother* is Watching, and we are it. When every stoplight and lamp post conceals a camera feeding your car license and facial features into police and FBI files for your own safety (with no warrant) and when spy satellites orbiting earth can detect via body heat sensors just how many people you have in bed with you at any given time; and when cells in your body can be stored, cloned, and made subject to copyright laws! Then we realize that the science-fiction future is here, and it's more radical than anything we predicted in our movies or our *Amazing Tales* pulp magazines of decades gone by. "He's giving you a number and taking away your name," might have been a fantastic song lyric to a great TV show, but now that it's real, what do we do? More and more stores (groceries, electronics stores, video stores, etc.) are unable to sell to me unless I can provide them with my social security number. I'm being turned into a statistic, of value only because of my earning capacity and buying habits, an identity to be bought, sold and traded between stores, banks, insurance companies, government agencies, etc. We can't even say invasion of privacy, since there's no more privacy left to invade in this world. Every move you make, every chance you take, *Big Brother* is Watching You. And he's you. Because we allow it, pay to support it, and enforce virtually no accountability on the people crunching the numbers, compiling the

statistics, using your own acceptance of the system against you.

How can the entertainment industry top that? Of course it can't, and judging from the recent eruption of cynical remakes, opportunistic reshapes, heartless reworkings of everything that's been done before, there's no one even trying. All the good films have been made, and all the good film articles have been written. The party's over.

That's my take on what might go through the mind of a creative person who's completely frustrated at every turn and who just can't stand to see something positive, the very thing he loved and lived for, melt in significance before his very eyes. When the horrors of the cinema become dwarfed by the horrors of reality, it's time move on.

Some great films are like religion; they make you interested in Death and After. As I mentioned, I didn't know Mr. Clarke personally and have no way of knowing his inner state of mind. I'm only conjecturing and pondering, from a film fan's point of view, just what might be felt by someone who saw situations spinning so out of control (in the name of control) and getting more dangerous for the individual citizen (in the name of safety for the individual citizen), and having seen it coming for years in the films we all watched as kids. The films we lived for.

With that in mind, I'm thankful for everything *Cult Movies* has done for me. Creating this magazine for ten years has cured me of any collecting mania (although I'm still interested in how the studios sold their films to the public). Working with film makers, critics, collectors and dealers has exposed me to a wider range of envy and hatred, warned me to stay clear of such feelings better than Scientology ever could. And it introduced me to some new friends I never would have met were it not for the magazine. Chief among them are Kathy Orrison (C. B. DeMille expert) whose knowledge keeps me humble. David Milner (interviewer of Japanese filmmakers) whose criticism of what we were doing early on in this zine made me feel superior to him, and whose knowledge keeps me humble. David introduced me to Gay Tucker with the words, "This fellow sees more in films than most people do." Tucker's knowledge and humility keeps me humble. And Frank DeLo Stritto, a Lugosi fan and tireless researcher whose knowledge keeps me humble.

Now as the year 2001 is about to become a fading memory, and we ask ourselves if we are truly better than we were the previous year (before the energy shortage), we can see 2001 as a turning point. Surely Nostradamus,

Stanley Kubrick, and Arthur C. Clarke viewed it as such. I don't know what the future will bring. I've seen *Dr. Strangelove* and I've seen *Colossus: The Forbin Project*, and I don't know that better bombs or better computers will solve our world problems. But I'm thankful for the people who make the world go round. People keep things in perspective, make for a brighter future. That's what I wish for each and every one of you, our readers. And that's what I wish for the spirit of the visionary Fred Clarke, where ever he may be now.

As for today, everyone who loves sci-fi, the world of movies and monsters, is gearing up for the 85th Birthday Celebration of Forrest J Ackerman. Invitations from Dr. Acula himself have already been sent out, so you may know the particulars. But everyone is welcome, and for those who are interested, here are the bare facts.

Forry's birthday party is being held November 30th, 2001 at The Friar's Club, 9900 Santa Monica Blvd. in Beverly Hills, California. Phone 310-553-0850.

There will be a gourmet buffet, party favors, famous friends and fans, fun games and entertainment. It's a formal attire affair. There's a slight admission fee of \$50.00 per person, and seating is limited. So if you plan to attend, you'd better make your reservations now. For RSVP and other info, you can call Mr. Forrest J Ackerman himself on that world famous phone line 323-MOON-FAN and get all your questions answered. Lots of out of towners plan to be here, so be sure to plan early enough for hotel reservations!

Many members of the *Cult Movies* staff will be there to take notes, expose a few frames of film, in the hopes of running a future article on this spectacular event. Our thanks are that Forry's indeed Alive At 85, still writhing, still writing and still putting on events like these. Our Thanksgiving this year will be at Uncle Forry's birthday party in Beverly Hills. See you there!

Concerning this issue? We have some surprises in store that we hope you'll like. Writer Ray Greene returns with his series of celebrity interviews which we will run for several issues to come. Ray is the former editor of *Boxoffice* magazine and brings a wealth of film knowledge and expertise. Even at a major magazine such as *Boxoffice*, editor Ray had to pluck in with the gang; scanning photos, laying out the pages, and conducting things the way we do it here at *Cult Movies*. You may be interested to know that Ray has just put the finishing touches on a feature length documentary on the era of exploitation and drive-in movies. The film is entitled *Schlock!* and it is fantastic. Old and new footage, some of it quite rare, is used in the telling of the



A young Harry Novak and star

history of this exciting era, incorporating new interviews with Roger Corman, Doris Wishman, Harry Novak, Sam Arkoff, David Friedman and many more. The photo here shows a very young Harry Novak in his office with an up and coming young actress during the production of one of his low budget classics. The photo was provided by Ray Greene and Harry Novak, who plays a big part in the new doc.

Writer Frank J. Dello Stritto returns with an installment in his saga about the research and writing of his mammoth book on Bela Lugosi's 1951 British Dracula tour. Judging from the fan mail, Frank continues to be one of our most popular writers.

We are also happy to feature the return of Don Mankowski with his article on *Fly Specs*. His early article on *Continuity in the Frankenstein Films* (CM#31) and CM#34's look at *Continuity in the Mummy Films*, went over in a big way with readers. In telling us about his current writing projects Don States, "*Continuity III* featuring the Invisible Man and his sequels is half finished, and I thought I needed a slight change of pace. I don't want to get typecast. Still, my *Fly* article is in the same vein as the others."

Many have asked about Guy Tucker; and at long last, his latest article is here. His piece on the Japanese sci-fi film *Human Vapor* will be of interest to many readers.

This issue we welcome actor, writer, layout tech, film authority Mike Malloy who contributed in many crucial ways to the current issue. You'll be seeing more of his work in these pages henceforth.

I could go on, but that would keep you from the main event, which is this actual magazine itself. I feel I've taken too much valuable screen time, and should turn you over to the main entertainment at hand. We've got lots of variety this issue, so...on with the show!

Michael Copner, Publisher

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Harry Langdoo Jr. is an internationally known portrait photographer with an exceptional studio in Beverly Hills. He has created marketable print

images for an astounding array of Hollywood celebrities, including Kirk Douglas, Cher, Robin Williams, Anjelica Huston, Robert Stack, Jane and Henry Fonda, Katherine Hepburn, Johnny Cash, and hundreds of top flight stars. Averaging one photo session per day for the past 30 years, Mr. Langdon calculates (assuming a six day work week) that he is nearing the 10,000 mark. Can it be that he has photographed ten thousand celebrities over his illustrious career? After all, Merv Griffin claimed to have given up a five day a week television talk show because there were no more celebrities to interview.

But Harry the younger is a superior achiever, following the example of his father who was a supreme achiever, in every sense of that term. We've written about the comic genius of silent screen performer, Harry Langdon, but of course he was a cult comedian decades before our magazine focused on him. He was a comedy superstar for only a few brief

*Exclusive
Interview*

HARRY LANGDON

years, from 1924 to the end of silent film in 1928. But he was a working comedian and created an amazing body of work from that point to his untimely death in 1944, retaining a loyal

cult following which continues to this day. However, in such countries as France, the silent screen artist had a fanatical following, long after silent films were out of fashion.

Langdon was a comic who achieved his greatness fairly late in the game, coming to films years after Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd had long been established. Langdon is usually referred to as the fourth genius of screen comedy, partly for this reason.

But Langdon has also been called the forgotten clown, a notion that is simply not true. Revisionist historians have no idea of the vast volume of work Langdon performed on stage, radio and in films, long after the coming of sound brought a more realistic kind of comedy in motion pictures, and for a short spell had Langdon stonewalled.

Over the years we developed a close friendship with the comedian's widow, Mabel Langdoo, who died early this year at the age of 95. She shed new light on the subject of her famous husband, opened a new window on the way we would view his work at various stages of his career. Those insights found their way into our magazine in various articles over

the years, and because of her friendship, we dedicate this issue to her memory.

But there is another aspect to the story. That of the comedian's only son, Harry Langdon, Jr. The life of a busy, in-demand photographer is not an easy one;

work is almost always the main priority in life. I've been trying to interview Harry Jr. since 1976, to get that other story, the other outlook that I knew was there.

At last, in July of 2001, we were able to secure some time with Harry Langdon, the photographer. The son of my personal choice as the greatest comedian of all time. Perhaps it was because of the tribute to Mabel Langdon we printed last issue. Or maybe it was our willingness to talk about anything Harry, Jr. cared to discuss. But we found Mr. Langdon to be the most candid, introspective, no nonsense subject in many a year. After expressing himself for a lifetime in the realm of

pictures, he was most anxious to speak his mind in terms of words, telling the stories of three fascinating lives in the process.

The Langdon Family Story is explored now in an interview we are proud to share with our readers.

by
JR.

*Michael
Copner*

SPEAKS



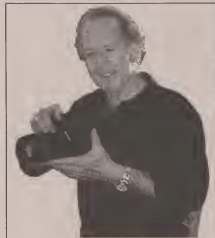
↑ **HARRY SR.** ↑

silent movie comedian



professional photographer

HARRY JR. ↓



HARRY LANGDON JR.

CULT MOVIES: A few years ago we asked your mother to describe an average day at the Langdon house, and she had a pretty down-to-earth take on things. She said she never felt as though she was married to a comedian. I wonder what your take on that same question would be.

HARRY LANGDON: I'd have to say that my childhood was a pretty euphoric one. It seemed like we had fun almost constantly. A lot of other comedians came over to the house. Red Skelton was one of my dad's friends and he was there a lot. Vernon Dent was there often, and so was a British comedian my dad worked with named Charlie Rogers. When we had our Canoga Park house it seemed like every weekend was open house, and of course Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy were there many times. And other kids would come over and play with the grown up kids, this house full of comedians.

Everyone was partial to musical instruments such as the banjo and accordion, and I can remember one time my dad and some of the others improvising some comic things with different instruments, including a kazoo. My dad died by the time I was ten years old, so I was pretty young and impressionable during these get togethers. I just somehow had the impression that all kids had fun like that, and these get togethers with fun grown-ups was what life was like. That impression would get strengthened by trips to the outside world. My dad took me to Columbia Studios and we saw Buster Keaton shooting a short comedy on the lot. My dad was working for Columbia also at that time. And I recall going to Hal Roach Studios and seeing that big lake right in the middle of the lot, plus a huge sky hung behind it. A lot of miniature work was done in that lake. Harry appeared with Edith Fellows in a stage show called "Out of the Frying Pan," which was very successful in 1943. He took me backstage during that show, which was pretty impressive. But there again, it just led me to feel that all of life was a free and easy show business kind of life, and that people had fun all the time.

CM: Where does a comedian go to relax with his family?

HL: My dad used to like to take me to a

theater on Hollywood Boulevard called The Hitching Post, since it showed all Western films. I liked Roy Rogers and Hopalong Cassidy when I was a kid, and I think my dad liked them also, since it gave him a chance to get away from film comedy. The Westerns also may have given him some ideas for comedies he was doing. I'd get dressed up sort of like a cowboy, in my leather holster with a completely working toy pistol, something that is probably illegal or unwise in this day and age. The kids would give their guns and holsters to the cashier and they would hang all the guns up on the wall. Dad and



Harry Jr. and Mabel Langdon

We would both get very engrossed in the films.

We also went up to the Rodeo in Newhall. My dad was friends with a woman named Patty Patton who raised thoroughbred horses. Again this is an indication that he liked show people, but also liked things beyond just creating comedy. He had lots of other interests in the arts, such as painting and sculpting.

CM: "Harry Langdon was a great comedian who had it in him to be a great actor." That's a quote from Stan Laurel that gets printed a lot.

HL: I know that Al Jolson wanted Harry to do serious acting. He told my dad he'd missed his calling just being a comedian, and that annoyed my dad a little bit.

CM: We've heard that Harry liked the medium of radio.

HL: That's for sure. He liked to listen to it, perform on it, and go in person to live broadcasts of it. Our family was in New York frequently, and we'd go to live broadcasts of the Fred Allen and Jack Benny shows. I recall sitting in the audience of broadcasts of the *Texas Star Theater*, looking at that giant red curtain with the sponsor's insignia on it. Other comedians would come out before the actual show and warm up the audience, which usually numbered around 500 people. There weren't too many shows using canned laughter in those days! And then the curtain would go up, the show would begin and out would come Fred Allen and the audience would go wild. We also saw Olsen and Johnson live on radio.

My dad was on Jack Benny's show. He was also on an episode of the *Lux Radio Theater*, a kind of mystery situation where a man hears telepathically the thoughts other people are having. We have the big disk recordings of these shows in my collection.

Then after we'd see a show or participate in one in New York, we'd all go to Sardi's Delicatessen. My dad loved that place. And again, he'd get the star treatment from the manager of the restaurant, which only served to reinforce that everyone was famous, and people got treated like stars all the time. It was a magical time for me.

One time he was a guest radio announcer for the boat races at Catalina Island, which was broadcast on KFI here in Los Angeles. I have the newspaper announcements about it in my dad's scrapbook. I think he would have eventually gotten into television the way Buster Keaton did, had he lived long enough. But when Harry died at the end of 1944, television was truly in its infancy, still in the experimental stages.

CM: Do you credit your dad with your interest and success in photography?

HL: My interest in drawing and carpentry come from the example my dad set. My interest in photography comes from my mother. When I was a kid in school I was in the Cub Scouts, and my dad would get involved with us doing plays for the



**Harry Jr., Gallery of Modern Art Film Curator
Raymond Rohauer, and Mabel Langdon, 1966**

school. He'd build sets, demonstrating and teaching us how to do the same thing. He'd get involved with rehearsing and directing the kids and help us put on shows.

I'd also watch him paint and draw. I was amazed at how fast he could do caricatures of people. He'd honed it down to a science during his days in Vaudeville and was touring the country. He'd appear on stage, then after the show he'd hurry out to the lobby and do cartoons of the patrons for a little extra money. People would line up, and naturally the faster he could crank out the sketches the more money he could make. He used that experience to help entertain the soldiers during World War II. At the Stage Door Canteen where soldiers went for relaxation, many actors would come to sing and perform for the guys. My dad would do that, and also do caricatures of the guys. I'd see 20 or 30 soldiers at a time lined up to get their picture drawn by my dad.

I can do paintings and sketches, although probably not as quickly as my dad could.

I had various hobbies while growing up. After my dad died, my mom got me interested in model balsa wood airplanes, and for a while that was my big thing. Then she got me a chemistry set which was made for kids, and I think she felt that getting me a darkroom kit was a natural extension of chemistry. So for a while I had a darkroom in our garage. But I had lots of hobbies. At age 14 I got a Model A car for \$100 and started tinkering with that. But the hobbies became something of a problem. By the time I was 17 or so, I think my mom felt I was socially challenged. I could do lots of things, but wasn't very good at communicating with people. I built a very good ham radio station from plans found in *Popular Science* magazine. It was truly called a "radio shack," and I built it myself. At age 15 I became an apprentice carpenter, and eventually joined the union as a journeyman carpenter.

But my mom was worried about my social skills and at 16 or so I was sent to Arthur Murray Dance Studios to meet girls. One thing led to another. I began to photograph some of my dancing partners.

But my mom shouldn't have worried about me. I always had a lot of abilities. I could frame a house, and was earning \$500 per

week as a carpenter. By age 20 I became an apprentice at a portrait studio in Santa Monica and learned the business and art in every detail. I'd worked at several studios and by age 29 I went into business for myself in my own studio. Sometimes I'd work 16 hours per day, still working for other studios, and literally moonlighting by shooting my own clients at night until I worked my way up to having a respectable reputation and top of the line client list.

CM: How would you sum up that climb to the top of the business?

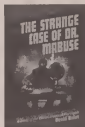
HL: I think we all inherit a dominant gene or creative spark from our parents. In my case it was the theatrical and the sense of adventure that came from my dad. I think I'm a nonconformist with my approach to photography in the same way my dad was a nonconformist in his approach to film comedy.

In commercial photography they don't care who your father was; it's the kind of work you create that's important. I feel I've made my own place in this world. However, I think that studying my father's work has helped me in my field, in creating images of the people who come to me to be photographed for movies and television.

I can see how parents want their kids to succeed and reach public acclaim, perhaps reach the parent's level of worthiness. That's a super feat when your parents are famous or unique. That's been my situation and mission. I think I've realized that worthiness, but it's taken a lifetime to do it. ■

The Langdon Family





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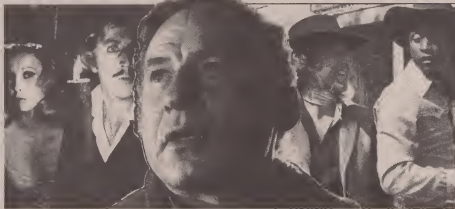


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comedy is a mel ***of a thing:***



MEL BROOKS **INTERVIEWED BY RAY GREENE**

Even if the career of comedic filmmaker Mel Brooks was not on the upswing right now—what with Brooks' stage version of his 1968 film, *The Producers*, being such a tremendous hit on Broadway—his place in comedy history would be secure.

It's not everybody that can spoof a beloved genre of film, as Brooks did to the Western with 1974's *Blazing Saddles*, and have that spoof outgross any and every film from the genre being parodied. But as big of a hit and as well-loved as *Blazing Saddles* was and is, Brooks will go down in comedy history first for *Young Frankenstein*, his perfect 1974 comedy based on Universal Studios' first two Frankenstein films.

But enough already! Such talk of Mel Brooks' past career achievements isn't needed to justify *Cult Movies'* presentation of an older Brooks interview. And that's because—thanks to *The Producers*—Mel Brooks' comedy is currently very vogue. Mel Brooks is currently the toast of New York City. Mel's name is currently on everybody's lips.

So here 'tis: Mel Brooks interviewed at the Brooksfilm offices on Oct. 6, 1995. He is being interviewed during the making of his *Young Frankenstein* companion film, *Dracula: Dead and Loving It*.

Interviewing Brooks is Ray Greene, founding editor of *Boxoffice Magazine* and the writer/director of the documentary *Schlock! The Secret History of American Movies*.

RG: So I hear these are new offices for you.

MB: Yeah. I was at Fox for a long time. And I liked it, I liked it. Fox was very good. On the other hand, they got busy. And if you're gonna be there, if you're gonna be at Fox, then they would prefer that you have a deal with them, some kind of a deal. I like to be completely freelance. My movies are made with split rights. I own, basically I control the foreign distribution of my films. And I think Fox was more interested recently in worldwide rights. So therefore, we didn't see eye to eye. I did my last couple of pictures with Fox, *Robin Hood* being the last one, where they distributed for me domestically. And we distributed, my company, Brooksfilm, distributed internationally.

RG: And you decided to move along, and now you're with Castle Rock.

MB: Well, they had a chance to do *Dracula: Dead and Loving It*. It started out *Liking It*, and then as we worked on it, we had to love it, and so we called it *Loving It*. But I think they were still up in the air with their policy of foreign and so forth. Meanwhile, like they say, the old cliché, Castle Rock came in and made us an offer we couldn't refuse. They just said, "Sure. We'll be happy to be your domestic distributor."

RG: Was what I assume is your long relationship with Rob, via Carl, Reiner a factor?

MB: Well, yeah. I think that helped. I always loved Rob, you know. Even when he was a little kid, I always liked him. He was a smart little kid. And when Carl and I used to do the 2,000 Year Old Man, we'd have a party at Carl's house, and he'd interview me, I'd be the 2,000 Year Old Man. And I took a peek, and there was little Robbie, sitting on the stairs, peeking through the bannisters. He wouldn't go to sleep, he wanted to hear everything. So he's been a fan of the 2,000 Year Old Man since he was 3 or 4 years old.

RG: And time goes on, and now you're in a business relationship with him. That must be gratifying --

MB: Should we wait for the fire engine to go by? So you're covering the current beat of films, what's happening and who's doing it?

RG: Yeah.

MB: There must be about 7 *Dracula* films, vampire films.

RG: That are on the way?

MB: Yeah. I mean there are three or four...

RG: I'm not aware of any others that are imminent.

MB: What's happening with Eddie Murphy's vampire comedy?

RG: Oh yeah. That's true. *Vampire in Brooklyn*.

MB: And *Nadja*, that's just been released.

RG: 'Nadja's' come and gone. That was never gonna be too much. And *The Addiction*, will come and go. It's really good, but it's a tough movie, you know. *Black and White*, very gory, kind of Freudian. But what you say is true, we're in a *Dracula* cycle.

MB: Yeah. I think we're the only flat out *Dracula* comedy. And you know, like *Young Frankenstein*, this is not *Love at First Bite*, this is the Todd Browning, Bram Stoker, Bela Lugosi, 1931 matrix, that's really what we're building on.

RG: The classic. Although this is in color right?

MB: Yeah. Because I did *Young Frankenstein* in black and white. Peter just got color, so I didn't want to disappoint them. And besides, *Dracula* works in color. You know the Hammer films—Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee?

RG: Oh sure. They sent me under the chair. I can remember the double feature at the Baker Theatre in Dover, N.J. We were screaming our heads off, and then it turned out the person in front of us was laughing, and she turned around and she was our second grade classmate. A little girl, all by herself, who wasn't phased a bit.

MB: Haha. So talk to me Ray. Where does this go in your issue? In the back, in the front?

RG: In the front.

MB: What's the cover?

RG: Larry Fishburne as Othello.

MB: Oh! Good, good. You know, that's Castle Rock too.

RG: Yes I know. The all Castle Rock issue. We've had good luck with Castle Rock. We did a Billy Crystal cover for *Forger Paris* which got syndicated in Mandalay or something.

MB: They do good stuff. They kind of do quality films, classy films.

RG: But smart classy, you know?



On the *Blazing Saddles* shoot: Brooks and producer Michael Hertzberg

MB: Yeah. Not schlock.

RG: And at the same time, they've got their finger on the pulse of doing good movies that are also commercial. They're not Orion. God bless Orion, a lot of great movies came out of Orion, but they weren't watching the bottom line.

MB: Yeah, sure. I just got a call from Martin Schaeffer, one of the guys running Castle Rock. And he called from an Air France 747 somewhere over the North Pole wanting to know about a screening we did last night. Amazing! Let me tell you, he's a great executive. He encourages screenings. And I love to do screenings. What I do is I make a rough cut of the movie. As soon as the rough cut is done, my opinion of it, my take on it, is gone. I do a rough cut. I say, well, let's be as faithful as we can to the script, and of course, use the best takes, the best performances, and put it together. And that's all I do. I don't do any more cutting. From there on in, in a dark moviehouse, there's a hundred or two hundred or three hundred or five hundred people who cut my film. I have tape recorders, sometimes video recorders... Because it's a comedy, it's very easy. I don't have cards, I don't care what the audience thinks about the scenery or the motivation. Are you laughing, are you happy, or not? Are you disappointed with this film at this moment? And they cut it, they really do. Pasadena was the fourth of five pre-mixed screenings. We started with

the bloodbath—that's the first screening. And the picture's always too long anyway. So we went up to the backstage theatre, and we had friends, secretaries—people in the business, but not pundits, not bigshots. People in offices, you know? Who wouldn't be shocked by a grease pencil line on the film where a dissolve goes, right? So we play it, it was 60/40—60 good, 40 terrible [Shrugs.] Not bad. Pretty good. Cause we always make about 25 percent more movie than we should. In our zeal, in our conceit, we think everything's gonna work. Until we show it to neutrals—the audience—and they tell us. So this bloodbath screening knocked out about 40 percent of the movie totally—this joke, this concept. And told us, More of this character! Peter MacNichol, they love him, stick more in!—Steve Weber, oh they liked him! More Steve Weber! So we took our cue from the first screening, then we went to Burbank, and they skewed it kind of young. I aim my movies right down the center, I aim my movies between fifteen and thirty, that's my target audience. And I like a lot of college kids, and I like a lot of professional people. Because I'm always making bad puns and witticisms that they forgive you for because they get the references, they know what you're talking about. But the little kids don't, you know? 12 year olds don't. And they skewed it young. In a way, it was better, we got more laughs. It wasn't a very good screening, we got too many laughs. Because 12 year olds are very sweet, they're very generous. And if they think it should be funny, they laugh. And so it didn't tell us too much, it wasn't a good cutting screening. Then we went to Glendale, and we said, no 12 year olds, 16 and up. And they were more severe. And yet we got laughs on nuances that we never got with 12 year olds. And suddenly the movie went to 65/35. Got a little better. after that, we didn't do so much cutting, but we did rearranging of scenes, and, you know, different takes and stuff. Then we went to Pasadena. Now the movie is about 75/25. It's really getting there. I am very happy if the movie's 80/20. If 20 percent of the humor is not working, and you want it to work, and 80 percent is, you should be happy.

RG: And maybe it skews out of the room. Maybe that 20 percent is working but it's working for a different audience.

MB: Right. But with this one, I think we're gonna get to 90/10. This one reminds me a lot of an earlier movie I did called *Young Frankenstein*. Because I do need the serious moments, I need the scare moments. And I need the storytelling moments, and the emotional moments.

RG: I was wondering about that, doing a horror comedy again at this juncture. Was there a particular reason, or was this something where you said, you know, 'There's a lot here for me. I'm gonna come back to this at some point.

MB: I was watching one of the *Naked Gums*—I think it was 2 1/2. There's 33 1/3, who knows with all the numbers. And I was amazed at the comic skill of Leslie Nielsen. I had no idea! What I loved about him is that he was very serious. That he never begged the audience for a laugh, and that he was a damn good actor. He played this Frank Drebbin well. So I saw him as Dracula. Suave, worldly, a guy whose lived,

a guy who knows. He's obviously attractive with his silver hair, and I said to myself, 'You know, if Bela Lugosi had let his hair go, he'd look like Leslie Nielsen.

RG: Does Leslie do Bela Lugosi?

MB: He does. He does. Beautifully.

RG: Him and Martin Landau, huh?

MB: They're both great. I mean, Landau was sensational. But he has a terrific Moldavian or Transylvanian or Rumanian—I don't know what his accent is. But it's very Lugosi. It's very Lugosi.

RG: What was it about Nielsen that caught your eye? Because when I think of your comedy, and I look at modern comedy and what's going on in movies by people who've been doing comedy for five years or something, it strikes me that you draw on a lot more sources. Now it's basically the rhythms and performance of stand-up.

MB: Right! That's true, that's very true.

RG: And so you end up with humor that's

Leslie Nielsen is the Dracula of *Dracula: Dead and Loving It*, Mel Brooks' 1995 horror spoof. Nielsen's Count has Mina (Amy Yasbeck) in peril.





Breaking for lunch and from *Young Frankenstein*: Brooks, Peter Boyle, Marty Feldman, Gene Wilder, Teri Garr, and Cloris Leachman, 1974.

kind of verbal. So I said to myself, 'You know, I've got to ask Mel Brooks: Has it become hard to find comics who are capable of doing your humor?'

MB: Sure. Physical takes! Sid Caesar! Slapstick humor! Harry Ritz! Right. Very hard! It is! I just worked in *Robin Hood* with a great stand-up comic, Richard Lewis, who doesn't do much physical humor. He's brilliant in close-up, but total body language, for taking a fall, is not his specialty. But Jackie Gleason, there's a great physical comic. Or the Three Stooges, of course, you know? And I love that. I'm from the Marx Brothers. Harpo was my physical god, and Groucho was the god of wit. It's all there. It is amazing though, that Steve Weber, who's a very modern actor, the guy from *Wings*, also is a Harry Ritz fan, and a Three Stooges fan. And so he, for some reason, learned that stuff. And he can really move. He can move beautifully. And Leslie is just gifted. Leslie knows how to take a fall, and Leslie knows how to do a take and a double take and a triple take...

RG: And what's so amazing about that is that until 15 years ago, Leslie wasn't

thought of as a comic.

MB: Leslie was a good straight actor. And you know, another reason why I loved him for this role—I never thought I'd get him, I was very lucky—was that Dracula, our delicious leading comic, is also the bad guy. And he's also got to be malevolent, and frightening, and scary. And Leslie can do it. Leslie is really a good actor.

RG: Because it was the Zucker, Abrahams, Zucker team that brought him into comedy, and because you brought them into comedy—

MB: I brought them into comedy, right. So they're paying me back, finally! Debt repaid.

RG: But it's weird, because he's apprenticed to do a Mel Brooks movie, because he came up through a sort of diluted form of your comedy.

MB: Amazing but true. That's a very good little mathematical diagram you just drew. But it's true.

RG: It ends up pointing back at itself in five or six ways.

MB: Yeah. And they trained him well. And

they got him in the groove of doing very good, sensational Brooksonian comedy that they started with *Airplane*, I guess after *Blazing Saddles* and stuff like that.

RG: This is one of those questions I don't like to ask, so you can not answer it if you'd like, but it occurred to me as I was preparing that we're sitting here during the week of the [O.J. Simpson] verdict, and because you just made a movie with Leslie Nielsen while all this stuff was going on, I couldn't help wondering if it had any kind of effect on him.

MB: You know, he divorced himself from it completely. I asked him about it, and he said, 'You know, I never really even think about it. When I'm in a project or on a project. He said, 'Would Lugosi be thinking about something like that? Would Dracula himself be thinking about that?' He said, 'I'm in Transylvania. I'm in 1893. He said, 'I watch little or no television. When I go home, I draw sketches of where I should be in this scene, and I make notes about where I should be emotionally in this movie. You know, he's a very committed actor. He was incredibly prepared, I couldn't believe it. I'd get on the set, and he would be our leader. Our Dracula, he'd be our teacher. And he also looked better than anybody else, because he was always in a tuxedo and a cape, so we had to all kowtow to him.

RG: So it didn't really have any effect.

MB: No. He got along beautifully with all the other actors, he would hold court. He'd tell 'em about his early days, you know, *Forbidden Planet*, and they'd all be at his feet, listening to this guy tell his story.

RG: My brothers and I used to walk around the house imitating him in *The Poseidon Adventure*, when he raises the binoculars, and he sees this wave the size of the empire state building coming toward his ship, and he says very quietly, 'Oh my God.

MB: [Laughs.] That's good. Oh my God.

RG: You said that he had to be both scary and funny, and since you're doing another horror comedy, and since you're a noted philosopher on comedy, I wanted to ask you if you think there's any kind of a link between humor and terror.

MB: Terror and comedy work very well together. There is a need to exorcise these devils, these demons, from our system, so that we don't have these nightmares. When I was a little kid, I'd seen *Frankenstein*, and I

had a recurring dream that he was climbing up my fire escape. Now, I never really analyzed why Boris Karloff, or why the monster, would pick 365 South Third Street in the Williamsburg area of Brooklyn to climb that particular tenement fire escape. Or why he would stop at apartment 5-B and try to get into my bedroom. I never figured that out. But I knew for sure he was after me, you know? And that's one of the reasons I made *Young Frankenstein*, I said, I don't want this dream anymore. I want him to be a friendly guy. I want to exorcise this dybbuk, this devil, from my system. And I think, in way, Dracula is even more insidious. Especially for women. They have this weird—I don't know if it's sexual. I think it is...

RG: Yeah. I think it's very sexual, whereas *Frankenstein* really isn't.

MB: Yeah right. *Frankenstein* scares little boys. Where *Dracula* scares and magnetizes grown women. And that was another reason for Leslie, because, I don't know how old he is, but he's damn good-looking and still sexy. He's devilishly handsome on the screen. And I thought that that would help the image. And you can see why Lysette

Blazing Robyn Hilton in *Sadist* (1974)



Teri Garr, Gene Wilder, and a whole lot of funny in *Mel Brooks' Young Frankenstein* (1974).

Anthony is seduced by him very easily. Lysette Anthony... I couldn't believe it. I first saw her in Woody Allen's *Husbands and Wives*. When Sydney Pollock leaves his wife, he has this bumbo airline stewardess, and he gets into big fights with her. She's absolutely vapid, her brain is empty, and he's obviously just going for her body. He realizes it, and they have this big fight, and it's a great fight, around trying to get her into a car to take her home. And she was great, she was great! And when she was suggested, I said to her agent, I said, Look. I'm taking a big chance with Amy Yasbeck, with her English accent. But she can do it, she did it in *Robin Hood*. She can say, 'Veddy veddy,' and she can say, 'The horses are settled and waiting,' and it's gone past ten. She really can do it. And I said, I don't know if Lysette can do an English accent. And there was a long pause. And her agent said, Are you putting me on? I said, No. What? He said, Lysette is English. I said, No. He said, Yeah. So I said, Bring her over.

RG: They're so good at doing our accent!

MB: You know, my movies are the only ones that get even with them. I mean, I really get the best English accents. Harvey Korman is Nigel Bruce in my movie. He's absolutely, Rasberries? We're not serving rasberries? He gets every nuance of that Nigel Bruce English accent. Steve Weber. Powerhouse funny English accent. And even a little funny English laugh, her-her-him-her. A strange little, bizarre little

English laugh that he developed. A tic. Lysette Anthony is English, so there's no problem. Amy Yasbeck went over the top with her English accent. Megan Cavanaugh plays Essie the maid, and she is sensationally English, I am German. Now, Van Helsing is really not German. If you want to be a purist, he's Dutch. But everybody that's played him, including Edward Van Sloane right from the beginning, plays him with a Germanic haircut and accent. So I patterned myself after Van Sloane, cause I liked his haircut. I did that kind of Prussian crew-cut wig, and then I did this accent, which I love to do. Somebody said, What exactly is your accent, your German accent. And I said, Well, if you're a student of German actors, I'm about 90 percent Albert Basserman, who was the professor that was kidnapped in *Foreign Correspondent*, and Joel Grey tries to save him in Holland from the windmill. Albert Basserman, who spoke like this, New! New! You cah'n't! Cah'n! Who iz it? Yaha, ve can do zis. So I did 90 percent Albert Basserman, and 10 percent Hitler.

RG: It's dangerous to do more than 10 percent Hitler.

MB: Right. But Hitler's always effective in the more histrionic scenes. I really enjoyed playing it. It's a very difficult role. I was surprised that I had a tough part, because Leslie had a tough part. He has to be very funny, he has to be very menacing, he has to be seductive. I am the storyteller. I am

the caveman, after the hunt, who sits around the fire and tells the story of the day. And who was nearly trampled by the buffalo, and whose arrow went through the haunch. That's my job for the audience. And I must explain to a lot of people what a vampire is, and why I believe Dracula is Dracula, you know, that Leslie Nielsen is Dracula. Also, because they know Mel Brooks so, I must be entertaining doing it. So I have to pick those moments that don't interfere with storytelling and plot to explode a little, vis a vis my own comedy. And every once in awhile, you get lucky and you blend both of them. You tell stories, and you're funny. There's only one time when it's absolutely perfect. They say, 'What are you saying? What are you telling us?' And I say, 'If she dies, a victim of this unspeakable monster, she will become one of them. And they say, 'What? And I say, 'She will become one of them, I just repeat the joke. So I'm saying a very important thing, but I'm doing it in a very funny way. You pray for those lucky meldings.

RG: It's interesting hearing you describe the role, because as we were describing that he's the storyteller, for a second I said,

Now, is Mel talking about his role or is he talking about his function as the writer-director? Going over it in my head very quickly, I think as often as not your roles in your movies have tended to be roles that could almost be director stand-ins—you know, you're the mayor of the town in *Blazing Saddles*, you're the president and the Yoda-figure in *Spaceballs*. They're almost directorial roles.

MB: You're right. You know, I always feel like an actor who can be the director within the stories telling the actors what to do, and what's happening.

RG: And maybe a part that permits you enough time to stay out of the screen and do your other things.

MB: Well thank god for your little monitor. Because right after you do a take, you rush over to the monitor, you take a look, and you say, 'Let's do it again. Or you say, 'Don't touch it! Move on. Thank you, God!

RG: You have instantly, at your fingertips what Chaplin had to put a lub on his lot to get. He used to do his takes and say, 'Hold it! Process the film, screen it, and then say, 'Maybe we need to do that faster.

MB: Exactly. It used to be we just had dailies, which you wouldn't see 'til the day

after. And you might be a set away, and that's a big problem. You don't want to trash that set, you want to keep it standing until you see the dailies. Because quite often, you do go back. In *Blazing Saddles*, there was the Mongo scene. And Mongo bent over the fire, I wanted the brim of his hat to be on fire and smoking. And I wasn't sure whether it was. And we didn't have playback on that one. When playback came in, I think the first film was *Young Frankenstein*...

RG: Really? They had video taps that far back?

MB: Maybe it was *Silent Movie* or *High Anxiety*. I know it was around then. But it certainly wasn't on *Blazing Saddles*. And so I had to wait. And I said, 'No, no, no, leave the campfire. And then sure enough his hat was smoking and I could go. I could trash that set.

RG: You talk about the audience sort of cutting your film with you by using the previews as a way of observing them.

MB: Uh-huh.

RG: And we were talking before about how comedians have changed and the professional challenges that that can present. I wonder if you feel like the audience has changed. Have they been trained into laughing at different things than they used to, or are they essentially the same?

MB: You know, everything has become quicker and more violent, even comedy. We're in the *Ace Ventura* school of funny. Trip, fall, scream, jump, bang—some of it is very funny, some of it just noisy. And the young kids, 15 down to 9, are kind of programmed to laugh on rhythm, on sounds. Dink! Dink! Dink! Bonk! They'll give you a laugh. It's like Beethoven, we get a laugh on his fifth—Bump-bump-bump-bah! It's perfect for the kids today.

RG: It sounds like Carl Stalling or something, you know? Like a cartoon soundtrack.

MB: Yes, yes. You're right. And it's just more difficult for weaving a lot of information before you pay it off—weaving story, weaving character. You don't have that much time to weave today, you know? You don't have the shuttle anymore, that little shuttle that used to weave a pattern, and then suddenly, when you finished weaving, they would say, 'Oh! Yes! This is what it is! But now it's got to be just like electronic media—Don't mail it, FAX it to me, man. It's all pay-offs. And I work a

long time on these lush, green verdant valleys of information before I go to a peak of comedy. But I still do that, because it still works. And because I have to see the movie later, after we open and get our first weeks grosses, after we run it. Later—a year later, ten years later, I have to look at the movie and still somehow be pleased with it, not say, 'No, no, no, no, no. I just ran after one joke after the other, without a thought about any information, any character. Any joyous nuances that I could look back to and say, 'Ooh, I like that little joke.

RG: So you may collaborate with the audience, but it still has to please you.

MB: Right. Yesterday, after the preview, they said, 'You could take this out, you could take that out, you could take that out, and I said, 'No, no. Those are for me. Those are for after we open, so I can smile when I watch it. And hopefully, there's a little triangle of people somewhere that will like those jokes too.

RG: Another thing that occurred to me in speculating on this idea of changes in comedy over time is that I think it can pretty safely be argued that your sensibility basically took over movie comedy in the aftermath of *Blazing Saddles* and *Young Frankenstein*, this amazing one-two punch. Sources that drew upon your sensibility, and on things that you were part of like *Your Show of Shows—Saturday Night Live*, for example, reflects your influence to this day.

MB: They had to be bright. They had to be smart.

RG: So movie comedy has moved much more in your direction in some ways than it was when you began doing what you do.

MB: Right! I mean, we were pioneers. There's a lot of very, very smart humor out there now. But like I said, there's a lot of rhythm humor.

RG: I wondered if the influence you've had makes it that much harder to create a space that's uniquely Mel Brooks' space.

MB: I just hope that they don't think that I'm aping the Zuckers now when I come out with a Leslie Nielsen movie.

RG: I think people's memories are longer than that.

MB: I hope so. That they wouldn't say, 'Who is this Mel Brooks, and why is he stealing the Zuckers' star and their type of comedy?' That would certainly be ironic.

RG: As soon as I anyone I know hears you're doing a Dracula movie they say *Young Frankenstein!* Hurray! ■

WILLIAM WINCKLER'S 'THE DOUBLE-D AVENGER'

They're back, and they're greater than ever. Three of the biggest and busiest Russ Meyer stars Kitten Natividad, Haji and Raven De La Croix make a comeback in *The Double-D Avenger*, the first in a series of sexy action/comedy feature films by William Winckler Productions, the independent film company bringing all-new original cult movies to today's fans.

In *The Double-D Avenger*, Kitten plays awesomely abundant Chastity Knott; an English pub owner who becomes a superstacked costumed crimefighter with amazing powers who battles villainous bikini bar owner Al Purplewood and his sexy, murderous strippers. "I absolutely loved working on this movie!" relates the curvy comedienne whom Meyer has oftentimes referred to as "hotter than a Mexican's lunch" and whose ample portions lit the big screen in Meyer's *Beneath the Valley of the Ultraxons* where she played the dual roles of Lavonia and Lola Langusta. "The character of Chastity Knott/The Double-D Avenger felt very much like me. I wasn't acting, it was really me. I am the Double-D Avenger. This was my destiny."

"This is one of the most fun things that I have ever done. One of the best things about making *The Double-D Avenger* was being able to work with Haji, whom I have been friends with for over twenty-five years. The funny part was that she was trying to kill me in the movie, and because in all the years we have known each other, she's probably wanted to do that, but I'm too fast and she could never catch me!"

Haji, who played unforgettably ethereal characters in several Russ Meyer movies, and is best known for her role as Rosie in the cult classic, *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* and Ruby Bonner in *Motorpsycho*, affirms Kitten's statement, "When Kitten was going out with Russ Meyer, the three of us would hang out together. In fact, I was there when Russ proposed to Kitten, and she unfortunately turned him down. That's how close we were, so much so that getting the chance to finally work with her after all these years is like a

dream for both of us." True to form, Haji fleshes out the role of the exotic

Hydra Hedder in *The Double-D Avenger*, and sinks her teeth into the part with gusto, to the extent of making her own costume by hand and wearing purple contact lenses. "This is so different from anything I have ever done in the past, so I tried to make the character of Hydra as unique as possible. It was a funny character, who was nevertheless sexy at the same time. I liked working with Bill (writer/producer/director William Winckler) and would love to do another film with him, especially if I get the chance to play comedy."

Raven, who starred as Margo Winchester in Russ Meyer's *Up!* plays the role of the doctor who suggests that Kitten's character, upon being diagnosed with terminal breast cancer, go in search of a phallic-shaped miracle fruit in South America that supposedly cures the disease.

Double-D Avenger also features cult movie legend Forrest J Ackerman in his 95th film, playing a significant role that pays homage to the monster movie genre he has long been associated with.

The films creator William Winckler, an unabashed fan of B-movies, says that this is the film millions of cult movie fans have been waiting for. It combines the sexiness of the

classic Russ Meyer movies with the action adventure of a comicbook and the brand of cheeky comedy reminiscent of Benny Hill. The result is a film with great characters, spectacular battles, mile-a-minute car chases and hair-raising escapes.

"*The Double-D Avenger* is a product of my love of classic B movies. I loved Saturday afternoon creature features, the Vincent Price movies, Russ Meyer films, the Japanese monster movies of the '60's, and Roger Corman classics," Winckler reveals. "Over the years, I've found that the main problem with a lot of independent producers is that they go

for the dark, depressing look and feel in their movies instead

of trying to recapture the character-driven films of

yesteryears. I formed my own

production company to produce

films that have heart

and soul, the kind that

appeal to true movie fans.

"I think this film has that nostalgic feel to it, and it's rare to have all the

Russ Meyer stars together in it. I

was honored to have Forrest J Ackerman in it, given the fact that he is a touchstone to the golden days of Karloff, Lugosi, Chaney, and Price. All in all, this is the cult movie for the new millennium."

Mr. Winckler is the creator of several previous productions, including the Japanese cartoon series *Tekkaman The Space Knight*, and the live action comedy show, *Skort Ribs*. He has acted in numerous films and television programs. He is himself the some of well known child star Robert "Bobby" Winckler, who worked in films with Judy Garland, Edward G. Robinson, and with the Our Gang kids.

William's new feature film, *The Double-D Avenger*, is 95 minutes and is available now on home video and DVD.

For more information, visit the website at: doubledavenger.com





W.C. Fields: Then and Now

by Buddy Barnett



W.C. Fields is probably the funniest man in the history of motion pictures. If you ask me, you can forget about *Citizen Kane* as the greatest movie of all time. That honor should go to W.C. Fields' comedy masterpiece, *It's A Gift*. *It's A Gift* is the most perfectly realized and satisfying comedy ever made. It is a magnificent viewing experience, a movie that can be watched over and over and still elicit the same amount of glorious laughter time and time again. In the case of *It's A Gift*, familiarity definitely does not breed contempt. That is the true test of greatness. The man solely responsible for this is the Great Man himself, W.C. Fields.

There is no doubt in my mind that Fields is the greatest comedian of all time. When I was growing up in the 1960s, Fields was an icon, a massive cult favorite who could be seen everywhere in the mass media: on t-shirts and merchandising, greeting cards, toys, television commercials, record albums, and just about anything that you could think of. His films were shown on television frequently, and his movies were revived in theatres all over the country.

Fields was a counter culture hero in the 1960s and 1970s. His comedic style poked fun at everybody and everything. He made fun of authority, ethnic groups, religious groups, pompous men and women, children. As a matter of fact he poked fun at everybody and everything. No one was safe from his hilarious wrath. His famous catch phrases such as "Drai!" and "Godfrey Daniels, Mother Of Pearl" were on the lips of almost every movie fan in the world.

So what happened to the adulation of W.C. Fields in the past thirty years? His stuff is still as funny as it ever was. However, he doesn't seem to be as popular as before. In the last decade or so, most of his old films have not been turning up on television. Many of his greatest films have never even been released to home video. As of this writing, even though there is currently a DVD craze going on across the country, the only W.C. Fields' films available on DVD are the *The Bank Dick* and his short films: *The Pharmacist*, *The Golf Specialist*, *The Dentist*, *The Barber Shop* and *The Fatal Glass Of Beer*. (The shorts, by the way, are all public domain titles.)

It is strange that we are living in a time where all of the Marx Brothers films, most

of the best Three Stooges films, many of Abbott and Costello's films, all of Mae West's movies, and many movies of comedians of lesser stature are available on video. Where is the majority of the W.C. Fields catalog? I think I know the answer, and it is not a pleasant one.

W.C. Fields, the king of comedy of just a few years ago, is the victim of that most dreaded of evils: the evil of political correctness. We now live in an era of sacred cows. You can't make fun of things that might offend somebody (even if it is only one person on a remote island in a remote area of the Pacific Ocean.) You can't do that anymore; the custodians of political correctness have decreed that you can not laugh at these things anymore and that if you do laugh then there must be something wrong with you and you must be sent away for psychological counseling and reprogramming.

All of the classic comedians have used material that is offensive to today's monitors of political correctness. W.C. Fields' problem was that he made fun of everybody and everything. So, basically, the arbiters of good taste have only one way to censor Fields and that is through complete suppression. And they have done a thorough job of suppression over the last few years.

As I pointed out before, many of Fields' best movies have never been available on video. The people in charge of many of the video departments have been ultra liberals and they find W.C. Fields—with his drinking, carousing, his ogling of young women, his smoking (smoking is particularly evil) to the guardians of political correctness in today's world, and his anti-social behavior—to be very offensive

to their sensibilities. So the tack that they often take (and I don't think that I am being paranoid when I say this) is to quietly suppress W.C. Fields' work in the hope that it will just disappear. When they are forced to acknowledge his existence and his importance to film history, it is always with a certain disdainful disclaimer about his 'awful' personality traits and mean spirited humor.

If you don't believe me, just look at what until very recently has been available on videotape. *The Bank Dick* and *It's A Gift* have pretty much always been available in some form or the other. These are his two widely acknowledged movie masterpieces, so they are always in demand. *Never Give A Sucker An Even Break* and *You Can't Cheat An Honest Man* have been out of print for many years (*You Can't Cheat An Honest Man* was recently reissued.) *International House* was available on video and laserdisc (but I suspect it was because the cast included George Burns and Gracie Allen, Bela Lugosi, and Cab Calloway). *Big Broadcast Of 1938* was released as part of the Bob Hope collection. *Six Of A Kind* was released as part of the Burns and Allen collection. *My Little Chickadee* as part of the Mae West collection. *Follow The Boys* is available but Fields only has a cameo role. Do we see a pattern here?

Where are *Tillie And Gus*, *If I Had A Million*, *Mon On The Flying Trapeze*, *Pappy*, *The Old Fashioned Way*, *Misadventures*? Some of W.C. Fields' best stuff is nowhere to be found. Is W.C. Fields really considered to be too horrible for public consumption by the powers that be?

Fortunately, the tide seems to be turning, relief and rescue are on the horizon. It all seemed to start with the release of Simon Louvish's full length biography on Fields, "The Man On The Flying Trapeze: The Life And Times Of W.C. Fields" in 1997. This great book has seemed to spark a slow resurgence in interest and appreciation of W.C. Fields' comic genius.

In the past year or so, Universal has released four Fields films under the banner of the W.C. Fields collection. This would have unthinkable just a few years

ago. Two of the films are actually movies that have not been previously released: *You're Telling Me* and *Million Dollar Legs*. The other two were reissues of *You Can't Cheat An Honest Man* and the perennial *It's A Gift*. Hopefully, this will open the door for some of the more elusive W.C. Fields classics such as *The Man On The Flying Trapeze* and *The Old Fashioned Way*.

Also, the major cable companies have not been ignoring Fields. American Movie Classics has been doing several festivals on W.C. Fields in the recent past. 20th Century Fox recently found and restored W.C. Fields' lost segment from *Tales Of Manhattan* and it has been airing on cable lately as well as being available on videotape. I am keeping my fingers crossed that more W.C. Fields films will be issued on DVD. I believe that people will, for years to come, continue to enjoy the work of the world's funniest man, W.C. Fields. ■



W.C. FIELDS



Above and left: Masterfully comedic actor and writer W.C. Fields at work in his office.

Left: Note the framed picture of Fields' mistress behind him.

ANYONE WHO SMOKES AND DRINKS CAN'T BE ALL BAD: A TRIBUTE TO W.C. FIELDS

by Brad Linaweaver

In the course of doing a series about Hollywood censorship for *Worldly Remains* I've rediscovered my undying love for the films of the thirties. Especially the early, scary, sexy ones.

There is a clear dividing line separating movies before and after Joseph Ignatius Breen began implementing the tough new rules of the Hays Office in the mid to late thirties.

The strongest evidence that the Hays Code had a deleterious effect is what happened to American horror films when they made their comeback

As a result of the British horror ban (causing a three year hiatus in production) there were no transitional films from the first American horror cycle to the second. When horror came back with a bang in 1939 and quickly settled into a formulaic B-rut in the forties, it was pretty obvious that the sadistic and sexual qualities of the Golden Age were gone for good. Artistic restrictions contributed as much to Universal's formula programmers of the '40s as economics and the vicissitudes of wartime. It was left to the independents to try and sneak in the good stuff!

What happened to Universal in the horror department was a special tragedy because they resisted the Code longer than their other competitors among the major studios. After MGM had already surrendered and covered Maureen O'Sullivan's Jane in clothes by 1936, Universal still managed to come out that same year with their first Flash Gordon serial as a last Hollywood gasp of glamour and sexiness before later installments covered up Dale Arden. But Universal still enjoyed a kind of revenge because they had an unexpected warrior in a different genre who did more to subvert the Code than anyone else in the late thirties to 1941. We'll get to him in half a tick.

The Code certainly needed subverting because of what it did to so many fine series. Already mentioned is what happened to the girlfriends of Tarzan and Flash Gordon. Meanwhile, the Charlie Chan series suffered from a less realistic

portrayal of a Chinese detective's travails in Anglo America; Nick Charles in the *Thin Man* films slowly started tapering off on the drinking until by 1944 he went on the wagon in *The Thin Man Goes Home* (a true horror film); the dancing girls in Busby Berkeley films were covered up in one of the greatest crimes of cinema history; and for the grimmest example of all, the anarchic humor of the Marx Brothers was brought under control by the same sort of pompous busybodies who were the butts of humor in their pictures.

This last example brings us to the genre under scrutiny: comedy. Obviously comedy declined as a result of the new rules but there was one spectacular exception. Thanks to W.C. Fields, comedy had a knight in tarnished armor in its darkest hour. It was as if his memorable Micawber from *David Copperfield* (1935) took on a whole army of Uriah Heeps.

There were only two genres that seemed to improve during the Hays Code period: westerns and swashbucklers. This observation has been made by sci-fi author Dafydd ab Hugh. He also rightly observes that during this period, film noir became a force to reckon with. (In horror, we see some of those techniques employed in the forties by Val Lewton in a brilliant way to address adult concerns under the nose of the censors.)

But for my money, the only performer who absolutely thrived under the Code was Fields because he was able to fight it in a manner that actually went over the heads of the censors. He was so far ahead of his time that he even foreshadowed trends that dominate today's comedy.

My favorite cinematic comedies have always been the Marx Brothers films and the Fields pictures. But not until working on the censorship series have I finally picked up on why Fields was harder to control than the antic brothers.

Take Harpo for example. His is an entirely visual and physical comedy. When the prudes took over, he was no longer allowed to chase the maids. Cuties didn't instantly flee at his mere presence. Those images of Harpo would only appear in reruns of the early films and in cartoons. Today they are probably seen as an archetype of the rapist.

But Fields is primarily verbal comedy. He has a physical comedy schtick (drawn from his background in juggling) but it is secondary to the verbal. Groucho is the Marx Brother most like him. Groucho has the funny walk but he is mainly verbal.

The later films show that a large part of Groucho's best verbal work is played off the physical bits of Harpo. The exchanges with Chico are funny but not as wild!

In contrast, Fields is a self contained operation, a one man show. This is not to say that he lacks effectiveness when interacting with other comics (Edger Bergen's alter ego, Charlie McCarthy, or Shemp as the whistling bartender) but Fields is best on his own. And the one thing he had going for him: that beat the censors was his real personality. The Marx Brothers were an act. Fields really did have a bad attitude! And he really loved the bottle.

He was politically incorrect before anyone had ever conceived such a thing. A good example was on the set of *My Little Chickadee* (1940) when he said in earshot of Mae West that she was "a plumber's idea of Cleopatra." She didn't like his drinking on the set and that little remark of his didn't make for a happy production.

It seems entirely appropriate in the pages of *Cult Movies* to compare the personality of Fields to the icon of this magazine, Bela Lugosi. No comedian had a stronger personality than Fields just as Lugosi held that particular crown in horror (and I say this as someone who prefers Karloff as an actor).

When I first saw Fields and Lugosi together in *International House* (1933), I couldn't believe such a film even existed. Back in '33, it was no holds barred. Cab Calloway sang "Reefer Man" and there was no doubt what he was singing about. Franklin Pangborn played it so gay that he could be in one of the pride parades today. Pangborn would later do his more recognizable persona as the standard sissy in the Fields masterpiece, *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break* (1941).

In the bizarre production of '33, Lugosi embodies insane jealousy and Fields embodies insane indifference. *International House* is the only production with rooms spacious enough to accommodate both of them. One has little doubt that when either of these men walked into a gathering of other celebrities that they would draw attention. They couldn't help it. They were major assets for Universal.

The next year while Lugosi was finally teaming up with Karloff, Universal produced what many consider the first of the truly great Fields features, *It's a Gift*. There has probably never been a film that better captures what it's like to be plagued

by daily routines. The universe conspires to defeat Bissonette (a name that will always be mispronounced to his disadvantage). Peace and quiet are goals always out of reach. He gets no respect long before Rodney Dangerfield.

If he wants to shave, his daughter will defeat him. If he attempts to sell gum to a blind and deaf customer, rest assured that the results will not be cost effective—losing hundreds of dollars in store damage to make a profit in pennies.

And if the poor guy tries to get some sleep on the porch to escape the incessant nagging of his wife, the result is one of the funniest moments ever put on film. An accumulation of little annoyances puts Fields in one of the lowest rungs of Hell where he will never dream again. But since this isn't a horror film, he just shrugs and puts up with it. Well, he does go after an insurance salesman with an axe but that hardly counts. One can only hope that the salesman is too frightened to ever bother the man he was really seeking, Carl LaFong. Capital L, small a, capital F, small o, small n, small g.

In his search for the promised land of California and what his wife keeps calling an Orange Ranch (not grove), Fields goes west and does find his pot of gold. When he whispers to his daughter, "I am the master of this household," so that his wife won't hear, he speaks to every male then and now. Especially every male who takes on the responsibility of supporting a family. (Imagine a world where a father who was a provider didn't have to sentimentalize his little brats every second of the day!)

In California, Fields fought his battles from the silent era all the way through to his last feature in 1941. My favorite of his films are *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man* (1939), *The Bank Dick* (1940) and *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break* (1941). Yes, these were made in the years when the censors were incredibly annoying.

Consider what Fields pulled off. In the 1939 production, his circus owner Larson E. Whipsnade sings this classic: "I'd rather have two girls at twenty-one each than one girl at forty-two." But that's nothing to what he gets away with in 1941. Atop the escarpment in the film-within-a-film of *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break*, he contrives to play the game of Squigulum with a beautiful young blonde. It means older Fields gets to kiss her. This happens not long after he has told his niece (the wonderful singer Gloria Jean) the following: "I was in love with a

A TRIBUTE TO W.C. FIELDS

beautiful blonde once. She drove me to drink. That's the one thing I'm indebted to her for."

Then, counting on the audience and censors to be thinking of cards, he asks the blonde if she'd like to play another rubber. Some of the slang we have today is the same as slang in 1941. It is remarkable that Fields got that one past the Breen machine.

These examples are sexual. But there is a lot more going on in the Fields comedies. The studio gave him complete control on *Sucker*, his last feature. With war clouds on the horizon, he showed a sense for absurd comedy that no one else of his generation could have conceived. During Gloria Jean's musical rehearsals, a crew of workers is trying to build a set at the same time which causes the requisite amount of confusion. But Fields doesn't stop there. Nazi soldiers from some other production keep goose stepping through Gloria Jean's song. It's like something out of a Mel Brooks comedy but before we entered the war.

The most sophisticated satire is reserved for the Russian village. Here we have sombreros side by side with traditional Russian headgear, a shot of someone in Swiss climbing gear clambering around what appears to be the Alps where he runs into a gorilla(!), a pet of Margaret Dumont, probably wondering why she isn't in another Marx Brothers movie.

This absurdity has a point when one remembers the year Russia was about to have the greatest defeat of all time. Fields could see the handwriting on the wall. His Russian village is a complete fantasy. It wouldn't be much longer before writers like Lillian Hellman would be doing their versions of fanciful Russian villages.

There is a post-modern quality to what Fields is doing. He appears in his last film as himself. He is "Uncle Bill" to Gloria Jean and Mr. Fields to everyone else. Yet his original story credit on the film is Otis Cribblecobles. Even Pangborn plays under his own name. A very strange film indeed!

Much of the greatest comedy in these final films didn't have any problem with the censors and I don't want to give the impression that Fields spent all his time trying to sneak things past. But when a joke ran afoul of bloneness or potential

political difficulties, he got it through.

Was he serious or kidding when he tells us that the ice cream parlor scene in *Sucker* is there because the censor wouldn't let him have another saloon scene?

What impresses most after all these years is how far ahead he was of the curve. He namedrops many of his fellow comedians in the saloon scene in *The Bank Dick*. He calls a broom a *Grisacho Marx* in *Sucker*.

But my choice of unique moment in his oeuvre is the song he sings aboard the impossible plane in *Sucker* (the one with the open air sun deck). Preparing for sleep in one of the berths, he sings the following drunken song:

"Chickens lay eggs in Kansas—chickens have pretty legs in Kansas." And so forth. While he grunts out this malarkey, we see the face of his beautiful niece, the face of a beautiful stewardess and the face of a beautiful woman passenger. They all look like they are listening to the voice of an angel and expecting the embrace of Clark Gable. Nobody could top Fields for wishful thinking.

Or consider another unusual aspect of his comedy. Who but Fields could do a carnival bit in *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man* where he tries to pass off two normal guys in fake beards as miraculous twins: "the world's smallest giant and the world's largest midget."

In that same film, he shows himself the erudite vulgarian. At the home of the stuck-up Bel-Goodies, he is dismissed as of a lower social order. But amidst all the broad humor and jokes about snakes it is clear that Fields is better educated than his pompous critics. Here we have a perfect commentary on his dealing with both studio bosses and the the buffoons of the Hays Office.

The ping pong game in *Cheer* reminds us of his gifts as a physical comedian at the right moment, but even there the verbal transcends the jomfoolery. No wonder he was such a hit on radio.

Another area where he achieved the perfect combination of verbal and physical comedy is in the most ridiculous car chases ever put on film, at both the climax of *The Bank Dick* and *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break*. We have seen

many wild car chases in comedies from the Mack Sennett comedies to uncounted examples today. But what works for Fields is again that inscible personality.

When a crook forces him to drive the getaway car in *The Bank Dick*, Fields gives him a boring tour guide's lecture of points of interest and laments the diminishing resale value of the car as it falls apart during the chase. When stuck at the end of a fire truck's ladder in *Sucker*, he takes a moment to reflect on the beautiful California weather.

He's come a long way from the harassed husband of *It's a Gift*. He can find peace and quiet anywhere he can still have a good stiff drink and a smoke. He called himself a sousse with the name of Egbert Sousse in *The Bank Dick* and made more jokes about his nose than anyone else ever could. And he wasn't the case of the clown crying inside. He had too much pride for that.

What would he make of today when Hollywood makes a film set in 1941 and 1942 where no one smokes? *Pearl Harbor* is an insult to the World War II generation because it thinks its vices too evil to portray. Fields would probably put a gorilla and fan dancers on the decks of the Arizona to warn the audience that if Hollywood is lying about tobacco, why trust them on the rest of the story?

Maybe the producers of *Pearl Harbor* will next do a film about Prohibition where the Volstead act is not repealed and no good person takes a drink.

We need W.C. Fields. Now we need him more than ever! Don't let them take him away. Don't let them use their computers to digitally remove his cigars and wipe away his whiskey. The teacher who came on the set of *Sucker* to make sure that Fields didn't drink in front of Gloria Jean never would have imagined taking away his film persona as a boozier. Why, even the Hays Office had limits.

In his last film, a secretary tells her boyfriend over the phone that some day he'll die in a vat of whiskey. Fields says, "Oh death, where is thy sting?"

An ardent atheist, he found time at the end to read portions of the Bible "looking for loopholes."

He was one of the greats. Our cowardly world makes his kind only seem bigger and bigger. ■

Right: Len Cella addressing the viewing audience, as he often does in *Moron Movies*.



Len Cella: **MORON** *Filmmaker*

Left: A still from the *Moron Movie* *How To Get Things Out of Your Eye*.



by mike malloy

you may have spotted Len Cella's 1985 video, *Moron Movies*, available for rent at your neighborhood vid-mart. It seems every rental place that has a good stock of early video releases has a copy. Perhaps you saw it on the shelf, inspected the oversized video box, and vaguely remembered hearing something about *Moron Movies* on television. But maybe you decided that its contents—over 100 of Cella's short films, such as *Jello Makes a Lousy Doorstop*—weren't for you, and passed it by. You probably didn't realize, though, that *Moron Movies*, that odd seeming video in the plain packaging gathering dust

at your corner video store, is connected to one of the most extraordinary success stories in the history of filmmaking.

Len Cella was a middle-aged man in Broomall, Pennsylvania when he began making humorous short films around his house. He had no training, no crew, no budget, no showbusiness connections, no cast, and only an 8mm camera.

But Cella kept at it.

and before long his homegrown films were being regularly shown on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, getting other national television airplay, being released to home video in two volumes, and bringing a book

deal to Cella.

But perhaps most important to Cella is the fact that his commercial success affords him a life of doing what he truly enjoys: making films that make people laugh.

in a March, 2001 telephone interview with *Cult Movies* from his home in the Philadelphia area, Cella told of his background. He mentioned high school, the army, dropping out of college a couple years early ("I had planned on being an architect"), working for a time in advertising ("I didn't like the 9 to 5 shift"), sports writing for a weekly newspaper ("I had more to say"), and even trying to make a go of it as a novelist. But Cella found his niche when he bought his first Super-8

film camera in the late 1960s.

"I made a short, a small short—a couple of minutes—on *Bonnie and Clyde*. It was a spoof of *Bonnie and Clyde*."

"Actually, it wasn't that good, but I showed it to four or five friends, and they laughed really hard at it, and that encouraged me to make more. And I kept making them. But I wasn't that impressed, because I think they would have laughed just because it was me."

"So then the friends of the friends started laughing. Then I got suspicious. I said, 'Maybe it isn't just the fact that it's me.' Strangers were laughing. I started thinking maybe I could make something of this."

And what was Cella's first move to begin a career as a professional filmmaker? How did he turn his hobby, for which he had an obvious knack, into a paying job? His first attempts were, as Cella described them, "dead ends." However, one dead end, Cella's short film spoof of *The Merv Griffin Show*, took him all the way to the office of the *Merv Griffin* producer.

"They were all set to run the thing. And I forget what happened."

"I remember the son of a bitch. He said, 'Oh, it's charming. Just right.' And then it never.... That was the producer of the show. I was in the producer's office, which I thought was very impressive."

So Cella had the encouragement of friends who liked his films, and now also industry interest in his work. But nothing was panning out, and he seemed to have little direction.

And then Len read about Spanish bull-fighter El Cordobes, whose unconventional matadorial style was not conducive to getting bullfights through the normal channels. So what did El Cordobes do? He got his own bullring.

Inspired, Len Cella sought to acquire his own theater space.

"I didn't have any money, but I started looking around for old places that I could rent real cheap. There's this Lansdowne Theatre [in the Philadelphia area]. Old, old theater. Built in the '20s. And I went up to this woman and said, 'What's upstairs?' She said, 'It's just old office space that hasn't been used in twenty years.'"

The second floor of the Lansdowne Theatre was a wreck. Wires hung down from the ceiling, there was no electricity, a faucet handle broke off in Cella's hand. But Cella got permission to clean and paint the space, and in a show of sheer dedication to his plan to be a filmmaker, he spent an entire year on the "Herculean task" of renovating the Lansdowne's upstairs.

by this time—the early 1980s—Len Cella had already developed his formula for short films. The shorts vary in length; some clock in at around five seconds, while others run nearly a minute. Most contain only a single camera shot, usually with the camera on a tripod and Cella standing against a blank wall, saying or doing his bit. His films include no other cast members. Friends apparently wanted to participate in these productions, but the independent Len Cella refused their help. For films with multiple characters, Cella plays all the roles. Cheap props abound, with a string of Play-doh doubling as a snake in one film, and with baby-bottle rubber nipples representing warts in several other films. Each begins with a title card that gives the short's name, spelled in white

plastic letters against a blue background.

And the title that Len gave his collection of shorts? "Moron Movies." The idea came to him on the links, when he heard another golfer being called a moron.

So let's take a look at some of Len's short films. *Ass Class*, for example, is classic Cella. It begins with the usual white letters on blue, and then cuts to Cella standing next to an easel full of drawings of different gluteal shapes. As if a professor speaking to his class, Cella flips through the drawings, describing the merits of different buttocks. With this droll but not uproarious concept, *Ass Class* is saved by Cella's performance—his great delivery of comments like the muttered "Ass abuse really pisses me off" when he sees a bad-looking ass, and the upset cry of "Jesus Christ, I don't even want to talk about it!" when he sees a yet worse ass.

In fact, many of these films are redeemed only by Cella's performance. His good sense of physical comedy makes *The Truck Wrestler* work. In this drive-way-filmed five second opus, a barechested Cella runs into frame and begins tagging and pulling on the front end of pickup to absolutely no effect.

Original ad for an early Lansdowne screening of *Moron Movies*.

MORON MOVIES

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Fri. and Sat. Nights Only

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MORONS HAVE MORE FUN

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R-RATED

Len Cella

Some of Cella's films are decidedly low brow; *Man's Best Friend* has Cella with a chocolate bar (meant to represent human fecal matter) on his shoulder, saying that a well placed turd will keep muggers away. And some are outright groaners; *Cheapest Airline Seat* is nothing more than a drawing of a rocking chair on an airplane wing. Others, though, are genuinely clever, brilliantly absurd, perfectly deadpanned, or even satirical. Clever is *Naming the New Disease*, which has Cella as a doctor and an off camera voice (Cella's, of course) suggesting that the new disease be named "Dicky Doo Doo Disease." The doctor replies, "No, I don't want a disease named after me." Perhaps Cella's most absurd short is *Shark Prejudice*, which features Cella—his hair fashioned into a dorsal fin—sitting at a typewriter and saying, "I can type 90 words a minute, but nobody will hire me because I'm a shark." The shark returns sadly to speed typing. And Cella's deadpan best is displayed in *Bad Transplant*, which has Cella holding up his hand of four fingers and one monkey's tail, explaining that the hospital was out of human digits. Cella then looks at the

monkey's tail hanging limp on his hand and says, with marvelous deadpan, "It aint worth a damn."

at any rate, the humor and filmmaking of Len Cella had attracted a cult following of friends and friends-of-friends. And when Len was ready for his first screening at the Lansdowne in 1983, he didn't publicly advertise. He was counting on the built-in audience of people that had already seen, laughed at, and eagerly asked about a formal screening of his films.

"The first weekend, I had four shows—two on Friday and two on Saturday night. There were four people. Four people total! At two shows, there was nobody!"

"These people were telling me they wanted to see my films, and then they never showed."

So Cella put some ads with the film listings in the Philadelphia papers, and gradually his audience grew into turaway crowds.

"They were standing on the radiators, laying on the floors. And I sold out for months. They were laughing their asses off."

But the audience did more than just make *Moron Movies* a hit. They also, in a sense, edited Cella's reel for him. Cella said, of watching *Moron Movies* with a theater audience, "If I'm at the theater, and I hear silence during a bit, the days of that bit are numbered."

And because he was still making more short films during this period, it turned into an interactive filmmaking process; the audience reactions to his completed shorts determined what type of films Cella would make next. "If I do a turd joke and you laugh, I'll do another one. If you don't laugh, I won't do them."

And Cella's approach to his film screenings was just as independent as his approach to his film production.

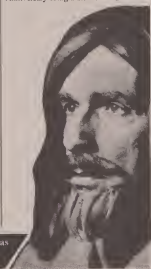
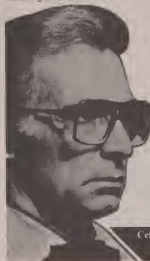
"I had to take the tickets, and then I'd get them all seated—and they were piled in there—and then I'd have to run down to put the "Sold Out" sign on the door. And then run back up and get behind the projector. Give them popcorn. Do every

damn thing. But it was great fun."

attending one of these screenings was Jill Porter, a columnist for the *Philadelphia Daily News*. And she wrote in her column that she "laughed hysterically" at *Moron Movies*. Showbusiness trade paper *Variety* picked up on Porter's story, and ran an article on Cella and his films, apparently using much of Porter's wording. The *Variety* article was small and inconspicuously buried in the paper (Cella later got a hold of the edition and had to search through it several times before he found his article). But it was enough to catch the eye of Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show* executive producer Peter Lassally. Cella, oblivious to any national interest in *Moron Movies*, got an out-of-the-blue call from *Tonight Show* talent coordinator Debbie Vickers. Cella sent tapes of his films.

"A couple of days later, they said, 'Well, we love your films!' I said, 'How much? How much do you love them?'"

A deal was made, and Johnny Carson began running *Moron Movies* on his show in 1984. Six or seven shorts would play at a time on *The Tonight Show*, and for a while *Moron Movies* were a regular feature. They even ran on Carson's 22nd Anniversary *Tonight Show*. Cella received



Cella as both a borderline believer and as The Almighty in his 80 minute film—*A colloquy with God*

\$1800 per minute per airing in royalties.

Carson himself seemed to really appreciate the humor of *Moron Movies*. And since his Carson Productions was involved with Dick Clark's new 1984 show, *TV's Bloopers and Practical Jokes*, Cella's work found another regular home on television. The same *Moron Movies* format was used, but the shorts were shown under the name *Len Cella's Silly Cinema*—a title that causes Cella to groan, "Aww, don't even remind me!" But *Silly Cinema* had an auspicious debut, in a rare non-*Tonight Show* appearance, Johnny Carson went on *Bloopers* to introduce Cella's films.

Silly Cinema would play on *TV's Bloopers* until 1988. But Cella never felt that his films worked well on either Carson's show ("Tell me when you've ever seen on a talk show somebody's home movies") or Dick Clark's show ("It had no connection to bloopers or blunders").

So in 1985, he began taking his work to other outlets. That year, MPI Home Video released over 100 of his shorts on a video collection entitled—what else?—*Moron Movies*. The video began with a dedication to Jill Porter. Cella had discontinued his Lansdowne screenings when he became busy with the *Tonight Show*, but he began booking a 16mm blow-up of *Moron Movies* straight into theaters around the country. In 1987, MPI

released a second video collection, *More Moron Movies*, and publishing house Spectacle Lane Press contracted Len to write a humorous book.

"[Spectacle Lane] wanted to do a thing called 'Moron Moments' or something like that. I said, 'Well, I don't know. I think it'd be forcing the thing.'"

Len instead wrote for them *Things to Worry About (In Case You Run Out)*, which includes humorous pieces such as "How to Get Along with Your Murderer." He was asked by his publisher to use his association with Carson to secure a book-promotion appearance on *The Tonight Show*. Cella never made that appearance, but publicity for the book touted Len as "a former *Tonight Show* contributor."

So what is Mr. Cella up to now? Why, still making movies—alone, of course—in Broomall, PA.

Cella switched from film to video in the 1980s, and has since graduated to digital video. He completed two films, *Cocktails with God: A Borderline Believer Argues with God* and *The Dog Did It (O.J. Laughs Last)*, which he never marketed extensively. He is, at the time of this writing, wrapping production on *Crap*, a *Moron Movies*-esque collection of off-color short films. Cella says that he has put more effort into *Crap* than his previous films, and that he plans to book it

straight into theaters. And Cella hopes to travel to catch these theatrical engagements of his new film. Because, after all, Len Cella's biggest reward is watching people laugh at his comedy.

"I wouldn't go to Utah and see it, but I would go all along the eastern coast. Maybe Boston, down as far as maybe Raleigh. And then I could get the kick out of being there when the people are laughing."

"It's 15 years that *Moron Movies* has been on cassette, and I get calls all the time from people who just saw the film and said, 'Aw, man, I laughed my . . . !' But I wasn't there while they were laughing!"

"That's not quite as rewarding." ■

**Cella and half a commode
seat in a new short from the
upcoming *Crap* collection.**



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by Don Mankowski

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And then forgot to tell us why.
-- Ogden Nash (1902-1971).

If you're like me, you probably first heard this observation in a doggerel short version that really gets to the point:

The Fly
Why?

The Fly that Binds

In his best-selling *Worlds in Collision* (1950), learned psychiatrist and crackpot cosmologist Immanuel Velikovsky argued that earth's flies were in fact of extraterrestrial origin, deposited on earth by a comet in biblical times. (The critters originated on Jupiter, and said comet was destined to become the planet Venus, but let's not get into that, please!) I'm not sure that it was his intent to respond to Nash's conundrum, but it does indicate that he considered flies as useless interlopers in this world. Talk about no respect! And, of course, the epitome of harmlessness is someone that wouldn't hurt a fly.

Why, then, a fly as a menace? Why the most classically inconsequential creature of all? Why not a more interesting bug, a locust, a wasp, a spider?

In a word, irony. It's the menace you least expect, and losing one's soul to this humblest of vermin ought to be the ultimate loss.

Gonna Fly Now

The Fly, a 1958 Cinemascope and Technicolor production of Twentieth Century-Fox, was the defining movie moment for kids my age and attitude, that is, those born smack in the middle of the century, and those who extolled imagination. "Word of mouth" was that it was very scary, and that would have been enough. But further, the premise was so captivating: smart-ass scientist messes around and acquires the head of a fly! Say no more!

Fly posters, if I recall correctly, had a challenge: "\$10,000 if you can prove it didn't happen!" As I shall demonstrate, any high school kid who'd been staying awake in science class could have "proven" to any intelligent person that it couldn't happen. However, there's a school of thought that says it's virtually impossible to "prove a negative," and even so, I'd suspect that the rules for what constitutes an acceptable proof were rigged. Still, that \$10,000 figure indicates some hedging. Hell, make it a million dollars!



I know that I saw the picture when it first reached the neighborhoods, and thus couldn't have been more than seven years old. And, I sat through it alone! Well, there were other people in the theatre, but it's not as though my parents took me along. I doubt they'd have permitted such folly, but you see, the neighborhood theatre was on the other side of our city block there on the South Side of Chicago, and I could get there without so much as crossing a street. (Didn't some other poster "dare you to see it alone?") But I didn't run from the darkness screaming. I loved the film.

Lord, off the flies!

The Fly begins in smashing fashion. Sorry, but it's true. Brilliant scientist Andre Delambre has been killed in horrific fashion, his head squashed to oblivion in a factory's super press, and it's clear that his loving wife Helene (Patricia Owens) operated the

machinery. Helene confesses, and appears to be of sound mind ... except when flies are mentioned. Andre's brother, François (Vincent Price) is aghast, but determined to learn the truth. The story proper unfolds in flashback; it will be some twenty minutes before we meet Andre.

Andre (David Hedison) and his brother are co-owners of Delambre Freres Ltd., an electronics firm in Montreal. While François attends to the business ("Delambre Shack?"), Andre is free to conduct highly secret experiments. For the time being, only Helene knows that the project involves the reduction of matter to atomic particles, and the transmission, remote reception, and reassembly of said matter. (It would appear that neon lights are the key.) In short, Andre's "disintegrator-reintegrator" can "broadcast" physical objects, even living ones.

Still, this is anything but a mad scientist. Andre, a devoted family man, sees great

benefit to mankind in his work. Instant transportation means that no areas of the earth need suffer from want. Why, when Andre teleports a bottle of champagne, it rematerializes chilled to the proper temperature! Hardly what you'd expect when molecules are ripped apart and reassembled, but those French guys will tolerate just so much with their wine.

The film's leisurely lead-up gives way to a frantic finish. In the midst of all this very optimistic disintegration, things truly come apart for the Delambres. Their young son, Philippe (Charles Herbert), has caught a peculiar fly, which his mother demands that he release. This affirms once more Andre and Helene's great respect for life previously alluded to, and foreshadows the denouement. A note from Andre summons Helene to the lab, where Andre awaits, unable to speak, his head covered in dark cloth. (Against his white lab coat, the black monk's cowl suggests some contradictory and unstable fusion of religion and science.) Through his laboratory typewriter, he begs his wife to locate a certain, very special fly.

Alas, the teleportation device betrays the occasional glitch. Dandelo, the Delambres' pet cat had failed to reintegrate. According to Andre, it's now just "a stream of cat atoms," as if cat atoms were somehow different from, oh say carbon or hydrogen atoms. (He talks down to non-scientists a lot.) The disembodied cat even howls at him, although we must assume this is heard only in his guilty conscience, at least I would hope.

When Your Head's Bugged Off

We, along with Helene, slowly become aware that Andre had his molecules scrambled with those of a common house fly during a transmission, and that as a result the scientist has exchanged his own head with that of the fly. What did Edgar Allan Poe say, "Never Bet the Devil Your Head"? Good advice, even in these times.

Well, he's swapped an arm also, but I didn't want to lay it on. Probably broke his glasses too, had he been wearing any. Clearly, he's in trouble! Andre still has most of his human mind, but it appears, in the best tradition of Dr. Jekyll, that the fly personality (if you can call it that) is gradually taking over.

Helene and son Philippe try valiantly to catch the peculiar white-headed fly, whose existence has taken on an entirely new meaning, but the plucky pest eludes them, escaping into the garden. It almost qualifies as black comedy, this very proper family flailing madly at a buzzing insect - and my, how huge that garden looks once the fly is out!

Sacrifice Fly

Andre is resigned to his fate, and sets up a plan to not only kill himself, but to destroy the evidence with his factory's nasty hydraulic

press. We now see that Helene unwittingly helped him to obliterate his fly head and arm in the machinery, and was at worst witness to a suicide. Still, she stands accused of murder, for no one will believe her incredible story.

Not at least until the man-fly turns up - in a spider web, about to be devoured by the, er, webmaster. Francois watches Police Inspector Charas (Herbert Marshall) freak out, smashing the whole horrific tableau with a stone. Moved, to say the least, the inspector dissembles a bit on his report so that Helene is acquitted. That's a good lawman, who bends it to see that true justice is done.

According to Carlos Clarens, writing in 1967, "the film's popularity is hard to account for. In itself it was rather a humdrum affair moving against its sole setting of a drab-looking laboratory, and it told an unbelievably absurd story in a genre that thrives on tall stories" (That's in *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film*, incredibly one of the first published books on our favorite topic.)

And he's right, literally. He might also have complained of some bad special effects: a real fly with a slap of white paint on its head (i.e., its eyes) passes for the man-fly. I'm certain that would put a bug up the, er, bonnet of some animal rights group today.

Fly, By and By

What, then, causes *The Fly* to endure when so many contemporary pictures of more conventional structure and merits are largely forgotten? The theme's the thing. Or vice-versa. Despite its fantastic premise, it's a

sample story, and a familiar one, combining the best of the Frankenstein, Metamorphosis and Jekyll-and-Hyde concepts. There's that physical duality: of course the demon limb is on the left.

The lead players are exceptionally good. David (then billed as "Al") Hedison is believable as the idealistic scientist, no mean feat, and his spastic fly-man has a personality all his own. Patricia Owens (her red hair radiant in Technicolor) faces terrors that few screen wives have, yet rises to the occasion. There's a love story that could move even sub-teen brats. I mean, the romantic interest in a horror or sf film (or a western or crime drama or anything else, come to think of it) could make us throw our popcorn, if not exactly lose it; but we behaved throughout *The Fly*, if I recall correctly.

The absolutely sincere acting, not only by Hedison and Owen, but by Marshall, Kathleen Freeman (as the bewildered maid) and ten-year-old Herbert. And one can't say enough about the Priceless Vincent. We love him when he chews the sets and goes over-the-top-and-back-around in starring roles, but wasn't he at his best under relative restraint as a superb supporting player, with just that twinkle in the eye to keep us alert? We are told that Price and Marshall lost it during the brother-in-the-spider web scene, and couldn't look each other in the eye without suffering totally debilitating laughter. However, they dutifully sucked it up and got through with it. Price makes a rather hokey pro-science speech to the just-orphaned Philippe work.



Patricia Owens is knocking but Daddy doesn't answer! Did he already fly the lab?

The Fly 1958

True, the sets are limited, but what's there is just fine. The noisy, threatening hydraulic press, represents a different, rougher technology massed. We have the dream mansion above, the claustrophobic, hellish lab below. (Don't underestimate the value of a cool laboratory in selling your flick to the kids. I don't know what all the neon, pinball effects and sparks have to do with the teleportation process, but they look very impressive.)

Then there's *The Unmasking*, the Phantom-of-the-Opera blast for our generation! The shrieking score, the gold-eyed fly face, the insect's eye view of the screaming woman. (Now, surely they show the fly face 'way too long, and should have covered it up earlier to please the critics, but the kids didn't mind.)

What about that crazy — no other way to describe it — kicker? The miniature puppet work spider is effective in its quick cuts with the bizarre mini-Andre, facing the most horrible demise ever.

If not exactly a moral lesson, the movie did raise questions in young minds, the equivalency of the fly-man and man-fly killings being the least of these. The menacing fly-man was Andre to the very last, though clearly losing it — and there are all kinds of parallels for Alzheimers, euthanasia, assisted suicide and death-with-dignity, long before these subjects were dinner-table topics.

The Fly was based upon a novella of the same name by George Langlaan (1908-1969), first published in *Playboy* in 1957. Although George's story is set in France, the film's Quebec locations allow retention of most of the character names, mercifully without fake

accents. It was adapted for the screen by James Clavell, later famous as the author of *Slogun*. Langlaan's Andre acquired parts of his earlier-disintegrated cat, making for a perhaps more horrible creature, but I'm glad that Clavell simplified things here. The novella had a nice, creepy touch wherein the reverse-fly is laid to rest in a matchbox, but that hardly compares to the riotous spider-climax of the film.

Kurt Neumann directed *The Fly* at the end of a long but rather undistinguished career. His cinematographer Karl Struss, had helped shoot F.W. Murnau's *Sunrise* back in 1927. Something about fly-man's stalking posture always reminded me of Nosferatu's, but I may be seeing things.

Return of the — Fleed!

The Fly was such an instant hit that the studio turned out a sequel within a year, *Return of The Fly* (1959). Oddly, *Return* (like the subsequent sequel to be discussed) was in 'Scope but not in color. The film is set some ten or fifteen years after *The Fly*, and begins with the funeral of Helene Delambre. Vincent Price as Francois is the only returning cast member, and he doesn't look any older. Brett Halsey is cast as Philippe Delambre, who is now ready to begin a scientific career of his own.

Philippe wants to pick up his late father's research, and Francois is unsuccessful in discouraging this ambition. Now, for Philippe to suffer the exact same accident would be a stretch on coincidence even for science-fiction writers of the 1950s, but a fly-man was needed. This time the transformation is the result of

sabotage: Philippe's assistant Alan (David Frankham) is a ruthless corporate spy, and he knocks out his benefactor and teleports him along with a fly just for the hell of it.

There's no mystery here: Fly-Man, Jr. materializes in all his insectoid glory in full view of Uncle Francois, and wife Danielle. And what a view! The Philippe-Fly is endowed with a bug head wider than his shoulders. You remember that 'afro' that O. J. Simpson wore in the 1970s flashback in *The Naked Gun* 33-1/3, a 'do that made going through doorways difficult? It's something like that, maybe worse.

The remainder of the plot involves the family's attempt to capture the fly-man and the man-fly and sort them out before such time as *The Law* rubs them out. Of course there'll be some mayhem along the way, but that's essentially what happens. Philippe-Fly only kills a few bad guys, Alan and his equally treacherous associates. After man and fly are unscrambled, no one has a notion to spray or swat the pesky gnat for its part in the homicides. All it gets is a sinister look from Price.

The sequel (written and directed by Edward Bernds) is more literal and conventional. It lacks the insulation of the flashback and the sometime secondhand accounting of Fly, and the monster interacts with the outside world in quite a few places. While a poor relation to the 1958 film, *Return* has its good points. The continuity isn't bad. Brett Halsey could plausibly be a relative of Hedison's. The ruins of Andre's lab look about as expected. And then there's Price, the only cast carryover; an Inspector Beauchamp is introduced as Charas' assistant. The custodian, Gaston, shows up again, and this time he's played by Michel Mark, a veteran of the very earliest Universal horror films (think *Frankenstein*, its that enough?) as well as Roger Corman's adenor bug-person flick *The Weap Woman*.

The temperamental disintegrator-reintegrator disgorges another grotesque pair of synthetic hybrids when a murdered detective is merged with a lab guinea pig. The resultant corpse sports clown-dimensional rodent feet, while the little nibbler shows up with badly matted-in human paws. There are more bad effects when we get a look at the man-fly, which animates Halsey's head over a blown-up photo of a real fly. But again, these are shown in quick cuts, and close scrutiny with modern methods is not really fair.

The b-f-w photography lends some nice noir. The countryside rampages of the fly-man very tall stuntman Ed Wolff inside the big head — are mostly filmed in day-for-night and have an eerie pre-dawn quality. Fresh corpses are stuffed in coffins as Philippe/fly eliminates Alan's thuggish friends (he seems to retain some of his human memory) in a funeral parlor of all places.



A funny looking fly in the web. The most suspenseful 30 seconds in cinema? The original *The Fly* 1958 20th Century Fox



Two tense scenes from *The Return of the Fly* 1959

Where's the Sultan of Swat... When You Need Him?

We should have no trouble with the "suspension of disbelief" required to enjoy a far-fetched horror or fantasy film, accepting the supernatural goings-on so long as these are consistent once established. But we really ought to ask more of a story that advertises itself as science fiction, and give the science a chance before giving up and falling back upon

the "fiction" aspect. Alas, *The Fly* is basically a horror film. The only reason that we think of it as science fiction at all is due to its impressive sincerity of storytelling. At best it has one foot — out of six — in the sci camp.

Please remember that any inconsistencies and incongruities may be explained as Helene's faulty recollection. Indeed, it almost could have been a dream; only the human-headed-fly viewed by Charas and Francous roots it in reality — and those two could be

victims of mass suggestion.

Now, the forty-odd years since *The Fly* have seen amazing advancements in human-to-human organ transplantation, and organs of other mammals (such as monkeys and pigs) have been employed upon occasion. However, any amalgamation of vertebrate (e.g., human) and invertebrate (e.g., insect) remains fanciful. I believe that transplant scientists use the word *chimera* for this concept. Simply put, bugs have a radically different biochemistry, never mind anatomy and physiology. Their nervous systems aren't organized into anything like a brain and spinal column, which is why they keep on keepin' on — for a while anyway — even when dismembered, disemboweled and subdivided. If you've ever seen a beetle pinned through the middle to a card in a collection go on squirming for weeks afterward, you'll realize that they have no really vital spots. Furthermore, their muscles are powered by entirely different chemical reactions. They're in the arginine phosphate camp, and while you may not know it, our species is unshakably devoted to creatine phosphate reactions.

As an understatement, I'd say that a man with a fly's head has all kinds of problems. Circulating human blood isn't going to be very useful to the fly parts. There is no breathing apparatus in the fly head, so the Delambre trachea must come to an abrupt end somewhere up top, although the human esophagus might be linked up with the fly mouthparts, if the machinery is smart enough to accomplish that. Insects "breathe" through tubular openings along the sides of their bodies. Even if fly-man has somehow acquired such "spiracles," their function depends upon air pressure and small surface phenomena. They simply wouldn't work on a scale a million times as large, which is another reason why all of those giant bugs of science fiction are truly impossible.

There's hardly any nervous issue that we'd call a brain in a fly's head. Andre must have a fly face on a mostly human head. Philippe kept less of his. But, the speech portions went to each fly-bug, with enough brain to effect talk. Fly/Andre's was the parrot-like "help me." Fly/Philippe actually called people by name!

Philippe acquired one fly leg, somewhat different in appearance from his fly arm. I'd guess that it's just a fly foot on a human leg, because no way could a true fly leg, even if man-sized, support a man's weight. (Curiously, his fly counterpart seemed to have retained six fly legs, so the teleport books don't quite balance.)

True, the cross-section of an insect limb could in theory be enlarged to human proportions, but this cross-section is a two-dimensional concept (i.e., area), whereas the weight it supports is firmly rooted in three

dimensions (i.e., volume). Say that a human shin bone is a thousand times as wide as a fly's leg. Accordingly, the cross section of the bone has a million times the area of the corresponding fly-part, as 1,000 squared is 1,000,000. Pretty impressive, eh?

But, the volume of the man-sized fly would be a thousand thousand thousand times that of the fly. You'd thus have a million times the area supporting a billion times the weight, and the strain on that area is thus a thousand times greater.

So, blow up a horse fly to the size of a horse, and its six spindly legs would snap pretty quickly under its new bulk. Unless, of course, the legs were thickened out of proportion to the rest of its growth. No, to make a fly as big as a horse, you've got to redesign it pretty thoroughly (internal lungs, a heart for circulation, et cetera et cetera), and by then you've pretty much got a horse after all. An ugly one, to be sure.

What then of a horse fly as big as a house? It gets worse the bigger you expand it. That's why the gigantic ants of *Them*, the humongous 'hoppers of *The Beginning of the End*, the stupendous spider of *Tarantula*, the deadly mantis of, well, *The Deadly Mantis* are never brought up, even by Republicans, when real-world defense spending is on the table.

Fly Specs

And speaking of stretching flies to human proportions, just how was this accomplished? Andre's head alone must have had the mass of a million flies: where did the extra fly molecules come from, and just where did the extra human molecules go? If the device somehow converted them or built new ones, then that's considerably beyond the original specifications. In fact, gloriously so.

Alas, this probably didn't bother most viewers. A few years later the film *Fantastic Voyage* (wherein a miniaturized submarine does microsurgery on a patient) was a big hit, despite its implied premise that matter was somehow continuous, and that objects could be reduced and enlarged without changing their physical properties.

Andre feeds upon "milk, laced with rum," (which probably stamps his heritage as Caribbean fly), presumably sucking it up with his proboscis. One scene has him laboriously attacking a pork chop or some such with his mismatched hands, but I'm not sure why. Flies consume solid food only by predigesting it with enzymes in their saliva (as demonstrated in revolting fashion in the 1986 remake).

We all know what flies really like to eat, but of course, that wouldn't "fly" in the 1950s, or most any era, except perhaps for Mr. John Waters. (Given that Mel Brooks was executive producer of said remake, and given that man's penchant for doozy jokes, I imagine that Mel had to be forcibly restrained. New fly man Jeff Goldblum pigs out on... sugar.)

Don't Try This At Home!

Enough with biology, what about physics, specifically, the teleportation of matter? I don't think that even the most optimistic scientists see this being achieved anytime in the near future. We'll be lucky to have it by *Star Trek's* 23rd century. It's not simply an extension of television to three dimensions, as Andre simplifies it for the masses.

If you can really take something apart into its constituent atoms, turn those atoms into electronic impulses, and keep track of each and every atom's initial state in order to reconstruct it, won't you reach a point where you no longer need the original to make copies? At this point, the machine's teleport functions become secondary, I'd say.

But at least they do suggest that early attempts will be imperfect, and are fraught with peril. Nobody's going to be teleported just to avoid more conventional means of travel just yet.

Now, why on earth did Andre, and later Francois and company expect a second teleportation to restore man and fly to precisely their earlier states? Aren't there a myriad of other possibilities? What if the man regains his head, but comes back with six fly limbs instead of one or two, or maybe with just the wings? Why are we any less likely to get a man-sized fly with a human head and vice-versa-verse-vyso-opsy-daisy?

Well, the wonderful transporter must have some corrective mechanism, must somehow be able to correct transmission errors upon re-entry. In short, it must store patterns for what it unscrambles and re-scrambles. *Star Trek* would expand upon this concept a few years later. I would imagine that had not Andre Delambre lost so swiftly his fly companion, nor Philippe his composure, they could have hit a "retry" button and had a good chance at coming out of this with no more than a hefty laundry bill for their undershorts.

Dandelo the cat may have been gone for good after a botched dissolution, but as Philippe's team manages to re-integrate subjects hours after disintegration, they must have added some sort of storage buffer to the device. Francois tells Inspector Beauchamp that the machine must not be disturbed if Philippe is to have any chance. That buffer, which stores all of the atoms plus the instructions on how to reassemble these, must have been a marvel of efficiency. Back in the 1960s, sixteen kilobytes of computer memory would have filled a room!

Flyweight Contender

The Fly Saga was continued in 1965, with a very minor if interesting effort, *Curse of the Fly*. The new production was farmed out to Lippert studios. Don Sharp, a veteran of several decent Hammer Films, directed.

Brian Donlevy stars as Henri Delambre, who along with sons Martin (George Baker)

and Albert (Michael Graham) and the usual inscrutable assistants Tai and Wan, carries on the family experiments, long distance. Henri has been teleported from London to Quebec, not merely to save on plane tickets, but to evade the law. It transpires that some of their experiments have (sigh!) gone wrong, and the results must be concealed. It seems as though everyone, Henri included, develops some scar tissue or worse from the experience, and he's one of the luckier ones.

Things come apart for Henri when son Martin brings home a wife from the world outside, Patricia Stanley, played by Carole Gray. Ms Stanley has, it turns out, been unjustly confined in a mental institution, just another unwelcome complication for the star-crossed family.

In perhaps the most interesting twist, an old, blind Inspector Charas (played here by Charles Carson) informs us that the Delambre men suffer from both susceptibility to the cold, and a premature-aging syndrome, something connected with the short lifespan of flies! We



Curse of the Fly British film from 1965 with very little relation to the first two films.

learn that Martin has to take Michael Jackson-style chemical treatments to avoid seizures that leave him gray and wrinkle-faced. It thus transpires that Philippe was not a hundred per cent restored at the conclusion of *Return*. Thus the titular *Curse*. One wonders, did Philippe's divorced fly live on for years or centuries of fly-time, or was it prematurely squished?

Patricia discovers the deformed teleports-gone-wrong locked up in stables, and one of them is Judith, no less than Martin's first wife. Henri and Martin are forced to destroy the evidence by transmitting the wretches to Albert in London. To top the disappearing cat of *Fly I* and the guinea-pigman of *Fly II*, *Fly III*



Jeff Goldblum in the David Cronenberg remake of *The Fly*.

has two of the poor devils, a skinny creep and a hulking guy, merge into one misshapen mass! This latest outrage induces Albert to destroy the London receiving unit, just before Martin beams pops across. Dandelo, here he comes! In the excitement, Martin misses his youth treatment and promptly withers to a skeleton

Flies, Pere Et Fils

I really can't help much with the family genealogy. We are told that Martin is Andre's grandson and Henri's son. Andre most certainly did not father any children after his flyfication, so Henri is difficult to explain. Henri could be the result of an earlier marriage (or a less formal union), but that wouldn't account for any fly inheritance, which Martin could only get through Philippe. Martin could only be Philippe's son. Henri could be Philippe under an assumed identity (although why he'd change his first name is questionable), although old Charas seems to think they're distinct people. Charas is obviously confused. He shows us a photo

(never mind how he got that) of the big-headed Fly II and says it's Andre. Charas implies that Andre's son restored the old man to normalcy, certainly a whitewash of historical proportions. Best guess is that Henri is an older, adoptive uncle who raised the boys after half-brother Philippe's old-though-young demise, and whom they think of as their true father.

Brian Donlevy, the fine Professor Quatermass of two Hammer films, was a good actor, here at the end of his career. He must have been good, because he was certainly problematical yet kept working. I've yet to read an account of any of these films that didn't mention what a drunk he was, so why should mine be an exception? He cuts a truly pathetic figure, a scarred (no passport!) fugitive whose dreams of scientific glory have come to this.

This ought to be some thirty or forty years in screen time after *Fly I*, but trans-Atlantic teleportation still relies upon radio-telephone, i.e., "Come in London. Okay to re-integrate!" Don't laugh! I've recently worked on far too

many computer systems where files are deposited automatically at light speed, but you phone someone to tell them to go and look at them.

Curse benefits from its understated black-and-white photography, and a nice piano-rich score by Bert Shefter (and it's justified, as we learn that both of Martin's wives are accomplished pianists). The slow-motion opening credits (titles by Francis Rooker) have Carole Gray breaking a window and escaping in scanty undies — far more interesting than the itchy-twisty flies in the first two flicks!

Six-Legged Legacy

The Fly was remade in 1986, and said remake spawned a sequel. These films are interesting in their own right, but the imitation serves only to flatter the prototype.

Despite the numerous absurdities chronicled here, the fact remains that *The Fly* has remained a compelling memory and an entertaining picture for over four decades, testament to a job well done by its staff and its cast. Here's hoping that it's available for nostalgic viewing, on whatever medium, when and if matter teleportation is actually achieved.

The Fly (20th Century Fox, 1958). D: Kurt Neumann. SCR: James Clavell, from a story by George Langelaan. PH: Karl Struss (Color, Cinemascope). MUS: Paul Sawtell. Mm: Al Hedison (Andre Delambre), Patricia Owens (Helene Delambre), Vincent Price (Francis Delambre), Herbert Marshall (Inspector Charas), Kathleen Freeman (the housekeeper), Charles Herbert (Philippe Delambre), Betty Lou Gerson (nurse), Eugene Borden (Dr. Eyster), Tolben Meyer (Gaston).

Return of the Fly (20th Century Fox, 1959). D-SCR: Edward Remick. PH: Brydon Baker (Cinemascope). MUS: Paul Sawtell. Mm: Vincent Price (Francis Delambre), Bret Halsey (Philippe Delambre), David Frankham (Alan Hinds), Danelle de Metz (Cecile), John Sutton (Inspector Beauchamp), Dan Seymour (Max Bethold), Michael Mark (Gaston), Florence Strom (nurse), Janine Gansel (Miss Bonnard), Richard Flato (Sig Dabois), Pat O'Hara (Inspector Evans).

Curse of the Fly (Lippert—20th Century Fox, 1965). D: Don Sharp. SCR: Harry Spalding. PH: Basil Emmet (Cinemascope). Mm: Brian Donlevy (Henri Delambre), Carole Gray (Patricia Stanley), George Roloff (Martin Delambre), Michael Graham (Albert Delambre), Jeremy Wilkins (Inspector Ronell), Charles Carson (Inspector Charas), Burt Kwast (Ta), Yvette Rose (Wife), Rachel Kempson (Madame Fournier), Mary Manson (Judith), Warren Stanhope (hotel manager), Arnold Bell (hotel porter), Max Anderson (nurse), Susan Simmons (treasure).

Don Mankowski was born in 1951, Chicago, and has thus been devoted to the Classics for over 40 years. He's a graduate of St. Xavier College and the University of South Carolina, in fields (Biology, Educational Psychology) that have absolutely nothing to do with his career. He is presently a software engineer for a NASA contractor at Cape Canaveral Air Station, but claims that you don't have to be a rocket scientist to like his writing. His other (non-movie) interests are chess and sports statistics. Watch for Personal and Impersonal: An Eccentric Look at Baseball History Via the Numbers, soon as it finds a publisher, and his computer implementation of Dr. Julian Compton's Data Boxing some day. No chess books; he's not very good at that.---

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"KICKING ASS AND TAKING NAMES"



Pt. II 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA



The story of the making of Disney's sci-fi classic, as continued from CULT MOVIES #34:

While Goff was working on his designs, Walt Disney was busy picking a director and writer. After rejecting a few scripts by John Tucker Battle, he finally decided on screenwriter Earl Felton and director Richard Fleischer, who had worked together on some successful B movies at RKO.

A graduate of Brown University and the Yale School of Drama, Fleischer began his film career with newsreels and short subjects for RKO during the early '40s. In 1947, he won an Academy Award for co-producing the World War II documentary, *Design for Death*. Graduating to feature films, he collaborated with writer Earl Felton on several low-budget, but well-made crime melodramas, including *Armored Car Robbery* and *The Narrow Margin*. In 1952, Felton and Fleischer teamed again to make *The Happy Time*, a Disney-like situation comedy about the daily ups and downs of an eccentric family headed by Charles Boyer. Its excellent script and direction attracted Disney's attention.

"I was chosen to direct *20,000 Leagues* by a committee at Disney Studios after they had reviewed my earlier films," recalled Fleischer. "At our first meeting, I asked Walt why he had selected me. He answered, 'I saw *Happy Time*, which featured Bobby Driscoll, one of our contract players. If anybody can make an actor out of that kid, he's got to be a good director.'"

Before accepting the assignment, however, Fleischer discussed the offer with his father, animation pioneer Max Fleischer, who had been Disney's rival for many years. "I didn't want my father to feel I was being disloyal," said Fleischer. "If he didn't want me to work for Walt, I wouldn't. His reply was positive, though: 'Oh, God! Yes! Take the job. I think it's wonderful. Tell Walt he's got very good taste.' A couple years later, when my father visited me in California, Walt honored him with a big luncheon at the studio and a special tour through Disneyland. They became good friends. It was heartwarming to see these two men, who had been bitter enemies for so many years, come together."

Fleischer's first task was to get a workable script, collaborating with scenarist Earl Felton. "While breaking down the novel, Earl and I became acutely aware that there was no real story, only a series of incidents," said Fleischer. The standard American translation of Verne is a very poor one. The original French work has a real story, but it's lost in translation.

"Our first step was to find out the origins and goals of the principal character, Captain Nemo," continued Fleischer. "We did it like a piece of detective work. There are a few hints scattered around in the novel—for example there is

Retrospect by Joel Frazier & Harry Hathorne

Pt. II

a portrait of a young woman and a child in Nemo's stateroom. Who are they? And why is Nemo wandering the seas alone? We figured the portrait was that of Nemo's dead wife and child, and then we invented his background and why he was on his own."

The screen image of Nemo differs from Verne's original, who was a misguided anarchist who seeks world revolution. He was also contemptuous of society, vowing never again to hold any communication with the civilized world. However, the celluloid Nemo is a militant pacifist, a man who believes in world reformation not revolution. He is willing to share his scientific knowledge to all nations if they will lay down their arms and end aggression. Such pacifism would have infuriated Verne.

The philosophy that is proposed and expounded in the film is very sympathetic to Nemo. "Although Nemo is demonic, he is a force of good fighting the forces of evil," said Fleischer. "He lost his wife and child. He was captured and spent years in a slave camp. He sinks ships that carry munitions and tools of war. He never sinks anything that is innocent."

Though the Disney version of Nemo is a more sympathetic character, he is, ironically, more cold-blooded than the original. He deliberately hunts and destroys warships without remorse; he always takes the offensive. On the other hand, Verne's Nemo always takes the defensive; he sinks ships only when provoked into doing so. Verne did not let his character kill for the sake of killing. He believed Nemo to be a compassionate man whose actions were created by the repressive environment around him.

"Personally, I don't agree with Verne," said Fleischer. "Because Nemo built that kind of destructive machine, I don't think he'd play by fair rules and wait for somebody to attack him."

After developing Nemo's background and philosophy, Felton's next step was to devise a plot which would give the audience the promise of adventure.

"In the novel, Aronnax, Conseil, and Ned [the three men assigned to find and destroy the evil 'sea monster,' which happens to be Nemo's Nautilus] simply go along as observers," the director said. "You can't do that for a long time on the screen. There has to be another story other than Nemo's. Earl [Felton] came up with a wonderful solution. He decided that the only way to tell this story and make it work as far as suspense was concerned was to make it about a prison break. Earl said, 'This is really a story about three men who are prisoners in a submarine. Aronnax does not want to escape, but the

others are always plotting and scheming and trying to take advantage of the situation to get out.' Once Earl hit on that idea, and we knew who Nemo was and what motivated him, these two concepts meshed together into a workable screenplay."

"Since we couldn't use all the incidents that were in the novel, we took what we felt were the most memorable scenes and put them in the script," continued Fleischer. "Everybody remembers the underwater burial, the cannibal attack, and the fight with the giant squid, so we had to include those incidents. We didn't use them in the same continuity nor in the same way because we counted on the fact that nobody ever really read the book very carefully. We felt they would be perfectly willing to accept our version, and they did. As a matter of fact, the story that is known today by most young people is the one we invented for the screen."

In Felton's adaptation, the Nautilus is powered by atomic energy—a far cry from Verne's electric submarine. "We had to modernize the story in order to give it a feeling of things to come. The challenge of our story was to keep the science fiction ambience to something that is no longer science fiction. We had to take a familiar object—the submarine—and make it an object of wonder and fantasy. Our aim was to put the audience into the position of never having seen or heard of a submarine before, and to lead them through the wonders of this craft for the first time."

A lot of violence punctuates the screenplay—numerous fist fights, the destruction of several ships, the implied drowning of many sailors and an atomic holocaust which takes the lives of hundreds of people. This was unusual material for Disney, and most unusual of all was Felton's idea of Captain Nemo and his crew forming a suicide pact. But it must be remembered that the screenplay was written long before the Disney organization became restricted in the kind of material it was willing to handle.

"If Disney studios made the picture today, they would not use the same storyline, and I don't think *20,000 Leagues* would be as good a picture because they have an established pattern to their films now," said Fleischer.

"Walt had a marvelous instinct," he continued. "He had his say in the formation of the story and made suggestions and contributions to the script. For example, the inclusion of the pet seal was his idea—the Disney touch. The script reflects his taste and a lot of his personality."

Another Disney touch was the injection of humorous material into the script to counterbalance the tense dramatic

moments—scenes such as Ned's encounter with the cannibals and his interplay with the worrisome Conseil.

Felton's screenplay for *20,000 Leagues* was not the first treatment the Disney production company commissioned. In 1952, while Goff was busy on the film's designs, Walt Disney hired scriptwriter John Tucker Battle, who wrote *Invaders from Mars* (1953), to turn Verne's novel into a screenplay. Submitted in February 1953, a few months before Fleischer and Felton joined the project, Battle's script was a literal translation of every incident in the book, nearly 300 pages worth that would run more than four hours on the screen. Creative differences between Battle and Disney led to the commissioning of Felton's script at the recommendation of Fleischer.

Battle's first script had a few problems: his dialogue was flowery and long-winded, and it took more than 45 minutes of screen time just to get Aronnax and his party on board the Nautilus.

Disney sent Battle back to his typewriter and by December of 1953 he produced a second draft. Cut down to almost 200 pages, this draft was still faithful to the Verne novel and contained references to the preproduction art Harper Goff and his art department had been turning out all summer. The interior scenes followed Goff's early designs including a double air lock diving chamber. Goff later dropped the separate air lock as unnecessary, since the diving chamber could be pressurized.

Battle's second draft did have several interesting character developments, most outstanding of which was a claustrophobic Ned Land. At one point while the Nautilus traverses through a tunnel from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, Land goes wild, screaming that he can't breathe. He bursts into the wheelhouse, seizes control and careens the submarine into a tunnel wall, starting a rock slide that partially buries the Nautilus. Nemo frees the sub, rams through the collapsed portion of the tunnel and makes for the surface just as everyone begins passing out from lack of air.

The sequence neatly combines two elements from Verne's novel, the Arabian tunnel and the trapping of the Nautilus at the South Pole, but such a character flaw would never do for a role that Disney thought of as the hero of the story. Both of Battle's screenplays end with Aronnax and company making their escape from the Nautilus as Nemo, overcome with grief and remorse, plunges the submarine into a maelstrom, wildly playing his organ. It's a rousing climax, but unlike the Fleischer/Felton collaboration, Nemo has no motivation in Battle's script and remains a mystery to the end.

About the same time Battle turned in his second version, Felton completed his final draft, in late September. However, it would go through a total of nine revisions during the six months of principal shooting.

In its first steps toward filming, Felton's screenplay was first turned over to Disney's artists and *20,000 Leagues* became the first film to have storyboards done for every shot in the script. Over 1300 drawings were made to visualize the story and Harper Goff rendered more than 60 sketches of the giant squid sequence alone.

* * *

After his director and screenplay were secured, Disney moved on to casting, selecting four actors who combined expert craftsmanship with huge popular appeal. For the role of the red-blooded, muscle-flexing Ned Land, Disney chose Kirk Douglas. It was quite a change of pace for Douglas who usually played unscrupulous, high-strung characters; the part of the fun-loving harpooner gave him a chance to display a lighter side of his talent.

Hungarian-born Paul Lukas, who won an Academy Award for his performance in *Wuthering on the Rhine*, was selected to play the erudite French scientist, Professor Aronnax. Originally Charles Boyer, whom Disney had admired in Fleischer's *The Happy Time*, was slated to play the part but he ultimately withdrew.

For the meek and mild-mannered Conseil, the professor's apprentice, Disney chose Peter Lorre, who, until this film, had been long identified as one of the screen's top heavies. The role of Conseil gave him the opportunity to show his comedic talents.

To portray the complex and mysterious Captain Nemo, the pivotal character in the story, Disney chose James Mason. The choice could not have been a better one. Although noted actors like Lionel Barrymore, Herbert Lom, Robert Ryan, and Omar Sharif have portrayed the enigmatic captain in other films, both fans and critics agree that Mason's interpretation is the definitive one. The subtle shadings and marked intelligence of his performance gave depth and dimension to a character that might have been merely a villain in less capable hands.

"To tell you the truth, I never read *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*," said Mason, who now lives in Switzerland.

"I refused to do the film a couple of times," continued Mason. "It was presented to me by my agent at the time, Ray Stark, who tried to coax me into playing the character of Captain Nemo. But I was afraid *20,000 Leagues* was going to be a

children's film, and I didn't like the idea of Captain Nemo being played down to a juvenile level. However, I couldn't help but to think that the script was very good. Then Stark attacked me on the subject of the director, Richard Fleischer, who had recently made a film (*The Happy Time*) which had turned out well. Stark had no doubt that Fleischer would have an adult point of view; he believed the film had a good chance of being a 'grown-up' picture which coincidentally would hit the juvenile market. So, I was convinced.

"*20,000 Leagues* was a producer's film and a spectators' film," continued Mason. "It was conceived by Disney as a story that could be translated into one exciting sequence after another. It was a challenge for the set designer and special effects people, but for the directors and actors it was routine. I do not believe that the acting parts were written at any great depth. Many sophisticated pooch-pooch *20,000 Leagues*. However, it's still a popular today because it's a good story well told. Disney insisted upon perfection. And I definitely share the fans' enthusiasm for the film. Not long ago I saw it dubbed into German. It was still terrific."

Later, Mason was offered—but declined—to reprise the role of Nemo in both versions of *Mysterious Island*.

Director Fleischer disagreed with Mason's statement about the film being routine for the director and actors. "I'm surprised James said that," Fleischer responded. "He couldn't be more wrong. It's just that Walt had powerful personality. When you make a Disney picture it's a Disney picture. Every one else gets washed out—the director, the actors, the writer. Until recent years, I got very little credit for directing *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. Walt's personality overpowered the picture and the public thought it was his movie."

* * *

The film's casting and preliminary design work completed, *20,000 Leagues* was ready to begin production, focusing on the logistical problems of filming the underwater scenes. Although his studio built a tank expressly for the film, Disney thought it was necessary, in the interests of realism, to film the diving sequences on location, and thus limit dry-for-wet techniques and tank shots. In fact only one sequence, in which two divers discover a treasure chest inside a sunken galleon, was completely filmed in the indoor tank.

To supervise all diving operations, Disney chose Fred Zendar, a former U.S. Navy master diver and a veteran of scores of sea pictures, including *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *The Old Man and*

the Sea, *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, and *Jaws*. Working closely with designer Goff, Zendar's first task was to develop a special diving rig: Victorian-looking in appearance, yet practical and self-contained. There were only two methods of going underwater: one in a diving suit and helmet which has air hoses attached to a surface pump, and the other in scuba gear with air tanks strapped to the diver's body. Goff's original idea was to combine both methods and have a diver, wearing a helmet, receive his air from scuba tanks, instead of a surface pump. However, Zendar ruled out the idea because air could not be piped into the helmet from a scuba tank. A diver's air supply, which is regulated by a demand valve on the helmet, has to be adequate in both volume and pressure. This would require a greater amount of compressed air than a diver could ever get from a scuba tank.

Zendar and Goff decided to use the scuba method. Pooling their talents, they designed a rig which allowed a diver to breathe automatically with an aqualung. Zendar, who handled the technical aspects of the rig, placed an aqualung's inhalation and exhalation breathing tubes inside a Japanese pearl-diver's helmet. To receive or exhale air, a diver simply had to breathe through the mouthpiece which connected both tubes.

Zendar's next step was to create a lightweight, watertight diving suit. "Walt didn't like the regular suit because it looked too bulky," the veteran diver said. "He wanted something tailored, so I got some surgical rubber, very thin rubber, and made suits out of that."

Because of his concern for what was, in essence, new prototype equipment, Zendar thought a little experimentation was necessary before he made the official presentation to Disney and Fleischer at the studio. On the night of November 6, 1953, Zendar, Goff, and another diver went into the Del Mar Beach Club pool to test the equipment. With each diver wearing a helmet, modified scuba gear, lead weights, and 16-pound lead-soled shoes, they walked from the shallow end of the pool to the deep end without any difficulty. Everything had worked perfectly—until the day of the presentation to Disney.

"I tested the goddamn suit in the Disney tank on the first day," stunt diver Norm Bishop said. "Walt was there—everybody at the studio was there. Once I got into the water, I realized there was a problem: I didn't have enough weight on me. Zendar, who was outside with the other people, saw me tiptoeing above the floor of the tank and knew immediately that I needed more weight on my belt. He signaled for me to come up."

Bishop made his way to the side of the tank and started for the ladder. "I was tired after spending ten minutes walking around the tank," the diver continued. "I barely made it to the ladder. Then, lo and behold, I passed out as I came up! I was out cold. Fred [Zendar] couldn't figure out what was the matter. After a day of asking questions, we found out that one of the special effects guy had cleaned the helmet—inside and out—with turpentine. The fumes, which I didn't smell, had caused me to pass out."

By this point, preproduction was far enough along for Zendar, Fleischer and Goff to leave Burbank to search for a good underwater location in the Bahama Islands.

"Freddy [Zendar] recommended the Bahamas because he believed the clearest water and best reefs were located there," recounted Fleischer. "We arrived in Nassau, hired a boat, toured all the islands, and went diving every day to scout shooting locations. First of all we wanted to work in depths above 32 feet. If we went deeper, we would encounter greater pressure and greater dangers in working—a lot of time would be spent decompressing. Also, the sunlight falls off sharply below 32 feet, and there is no variety in color. We couldn't get very much exposure because everything is blue."

"Eventually, we found a place called Lyford Cay, which was uniquely situated on the western tip of New Providence Island," continued Fleischer. "It had a beautiful reef, a white bottom, and was only 28 feet deep. Being on the tip of the island, we could shoot either on the lee side or the windward side of the cay. So, if we had bad weather on one side, we'd have good protection on the other. It was a perfect location."

The move to Lyford Cay, New Providence called for planning equal to that of a military maneuver. More than 20 tons of equipment—ranging from a 30-cent screwdriver to three specially-rigged underwater cameras valued at \$5,000 each—had to be packed into 212 wooden crates. Then a fleet of six boats assembled, including a 110-foot LCT, which served as the main base of operations, a LCM for use as a camera barge, and four speed boats which served as water-taxis.

On New Year's Eve, 1953, Fleischer and Zendar arrived in Nassau, New Providence with a crew of 54 men and enough equipment to sink a small barge. Because the divers depended on compressed air when they worked beneath water, two giant air compressors were flown in to fill the 350 cylinders, each of which held 200 cubic feet of air at 2,000 pounds pressure. On the average day, the troupe would use 50 of these cylinders, or 10,000 cubic feet of compressed air.

After one year of preproduction, filming finally began on January 11, 1954. The first scene to be shot was also the most difficult—a complicated burial scene in which a crew member from the Nautilus is laid to rest in a coral grave. The scene, which took eight tedious days to film, required 33 men to be underwater simultaneously—11 in front of the camera and 22 behind it, including the cameraman, his assistants, prop men, grips, a still photographer and the ever-present underwater safety men.

On a typical day, Fleischer's first step was to diagram the action on a blackboard, and then have the actor/divers rehearse the scene on shore, step by step, until every man was familiar with every movement.

After the dry rehearsal, the cast was taxied to the LTC barge where they put on their diving gear. Dubbed the "Nemo" in honor of the moody captain of the Nautilus, the diving rig consisted of six parts, a copper helmet with a breastplate, a flexible, waterproof suit, two compressed air tanks, an emergency tank worn on the front of the suit, lead weights to balance the air tanks, and lead-soled shoes. Standard wear included long woolen underwear, heavy woolen socks and black leather gloves. The total weight of the gear was approximately 150 pounds.

The adventure written a hundred years before its time becomes a motion picture to be remembered forever!

Walt Disney 20,000 Leagues UNDER THE SEA

TECHNICOLOR
CINEMASCOPE

Directed by IRVING FLEISCHER — Screenplay by FRED ZENDAR

Starring BOB HOPE, JANE FARRAR, and BOB CRAWFORD



After being put on air, the divers were helped from their bench to a rowboat which transported them to the shooting location. Once there, they lowered themselves to the ocean floor from ropes which hung over the sides of the boat. Each diver was met by an underwater guide (clad in a yellow shirt) who led them to his position in front of the camera.

"Each man carried a small air bottle with a needle which could go into the cuff of a suit and give a diver air if he had a problem," recalled Zendar. "We also had the surface guards who were always in verbal contact with the boat."

Added Bishop, "We had a safety man for every two divers, including a 300-pound wrestler who could tuck one under each arm and swim up."

To photograph the underwater scenes, cameraman Till Gabbam used a self-powered, remote-controlled Mitchell camera with a CinemaScope lens inside a pressurized, waterproof case. Specially adapted for underwater filming by the Disney Machine Shop, the camera was mounted on a scaffold-platform which could be raised from five to 20 feet. Gabbam also used a portable Aquaflex Camerette, encased in a water-tight blimp for "swim-through" and dolly shots.

To communicate underwater, the Disney crew devised a set of 12 hand signals to cover such film directions as "action," "cut," "repeat scene," and—most important of them all—one for "emergency—get me to the surface immediately!"

"We had well-planned emergency procedures if something should happen to a diver," said Fleischer. "Because we were so safety-conscious, nothing ever happened—until the people from *Life* magazine, who were covering the picture, asked us to stage an emergency so they could photograph a rescue operation. We decided to play along. However, while planning the fake emergency, two real ones occurred! One diver ripped his suit on a piece of coral. We took him out of the water immediately."

"The other emergency was more unusual," Fleischer continued

way a diver could release the stale air in his helmet was by pushing an inside valve with the back of his head. One diver was getting a bruise on his head from hitting the valve, so he decided to wear a woolen cap to help stop the irritation. But each time he pushed the valve, the cap would move a little further down his forehead. Inevitably, it slipped down over his eyes and made him absolutely blind.

"He raised one arm, which signaled he had a problem, but it wasn't serious," Fleischer continued. "The safety men came over to him and looked through the front window, but they couldn't see anything because it was too dark inside. Eventually, another diver came over and put his copper helmet against the helmet of the diver in distress. Earlier it was discovered that the divers could talk to each other when they put their helmets together. When the diver was asked what the problem was, he let go of his stiff-necked mouthpiece and replied, 'The cap's over my eyes!' As he answered, the cap slipped farther down and covered his mouth. Since he couldn't get the mouthpiece to breathe, he raised both of his arms which indicated he had a serious problem. The safety men got him to the surface quickly and unscrewed his helmet so he could get air."

Although these emergencies were rare, filming beneath the waters of Lyford Cay was still unusually laborious. The underwater illumination from the sun due to cloud cover, and its duration in the best of times never lasted more than six hours. Shooting was usually done between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. with a maximum of four dives a day.

"A diver's oxygen supply was good for only one hour," said Fleischer. "The whole operation had to be completed within that limited period for safety. We would allow no more than 55 minutes from the time the first diver was put on air until the last diver went off air and was back on the barge."

Daily the crew faced frustrating weather, choppy water and underwater turbulence. "On some days when the conditions seemed right, a cloud would cover the sun and we'd have to stop because we didn't have enough exposure," Fleischer said. "On other days, the tide change would lift up the stuff from the bottom, and the silt would hang in the water for hours and drift right in front of the camera." To avoid having the divers kick up clouds of sand and coral dust, the director had heavy hemp matting carpeted along the ocean floor.

Although the reef abounded with numerous species of colorful fish, capturing them on film proved difficult.

Frightened by whirling cameras and human activity, the reef fish would always scatter in different directions before a shot was completed. Because every scene required the presence of as many creatures as the camera could catch, local fishermen were recruited to net large quantities of them. Once netted, they were placed in wire mesh pens until needed for a scene. When Fleischer was ready to shoot, the fish would be placed in small cages by the prop men, who released them out of camera range on cue.

The most unusual incident experienced by the Disney company involved an eight-foot shark. "After the shark was captured and killed, we sewed up its mouth and left it on the deck overnight," the director said. "The next day, we attached a cable to its mouth so we could pull the creature in any direction. I wanted an over-the-shoulder shot of the shark, so a camera was tied to the shark's back with a rope that had a slipknot. If anything went wrong, the cameraman simply had to pull the slipknot to release the camera."

"We put the shark into the water and made a couple of dives. Without any warning, the shark revved on the last dive, broke the cable and dived straight down. The cameraman pulled the slipknot, but it failed to release the camera. The shark took off into the deep with the man in tow. He refused to let go. Finally, he was able to free the camera, but he damaged both eardrums in the process. Realizing he needed the shark for several scenes, Fleischer offered a bonus to the person who successfully retrieved it. Since the shark was not considered dangerous—

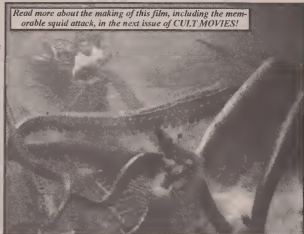
its mouth was still wired—everybody decided to give it a shot.

"Two divers went out to deep water to look for it," the director said. "At first they didn't see anything, but then one of them spotted the shark. Swimming up to the creature, he grabbed the tail and shook it, hoping to force the shark back to the barge. Suddenly, he felt a tap on his shoulder, and saw the other diver pointing at the creature's mouth, which apparently was not wired. They were intimidating the wrong shark! I was sitting on the barge when I saw these two divers come out of the water like beach balls. Needless to say, they got out in hurry. We never did find the shark."

By the middle of February (1954), Fleischer had finished shooting the major portion of the underwater footage. (A second unit, under the direction of Elmo Williams, would tie up the loose ends). Fleischer turned to filming the cannibal island sequence with actors Kirk Douglas and Peter Lorre. Because a suitable location could not be found in the Bahamas, the director decided to shoot on the island of Jamaica, a tropical paradise known for its beautiful flora and white sand beaches.

Arriving in Montego Bay, the company recruited local residents to play the cannibals. Shooting progressed smoothly, and the sequence was completed in two weeks. On March 2, the exhaustive location work finally came to an end. Seventeen days over schedule because of bad weather conditions, the cast and crew headed back to California and the controlled conditions of the Disney Studios. ■

Read more about the making of this film, including the memorable squid attack, in the next issue of **CULT MOVIES!**



CULT MOVIES

Sword and sandal films. Peplums. Whatever you call them, these cinematic takes on mythological heroes were an international film craze in the early 1960s, sparked by the success of professional bodybuilder Steve Reeve's performance as Hercules in a 1958 Italian film. But to leave the story of the Peplum at that would be a mistake. Although Reeves is most commonly associated with these films, other actors too stepped into sandals and made significant contributions to the genre. Reg Park, also a pro bodybuilder, was one such actor.

Reg Park began playing Hercules in 1961, and did turns as the son of Zeus in such films as *Hercules and the Captive Women* and *Hercules in the Haunted World*. What follows is an interview with Park by Gary Smith, an authority on epic films and the author of a coming book on the subject.

Park as Hercules in garb that effectively displays his Herculean physique.



REG PARK: HERCULES UNGAGGED!

Interview by Gary Smith



Locked in his room, Hercules (Park) bends the window bars and escapes in *Hercules and the Captive Women*.

I had the good fortune to be able to speak with Reg Park in person on January 3, 2000 at his son's gym in Los Angeles. At age 70, he looks about fifteen years younger and was instantly recognizable to me as the actor I had seen as Hercules.

Gary Smith: I often see you referred to as a "South African Bodybuilder," but aren't you, in fact, English?

Reg Park: Yes. I was born in Yorkshire, England in 1929.

GS: How did you become interested in bodybuilding?

RP: I originally took it up to supplement my soccer playing. Eventually, bodybuilding became my main

interest. I remember getting a bodybuilding magazine published by Bernard McFadden, who ran the 1940 Mr. America contest. One of my inspirations was American weightlifting champion John Grimek. Grimek won Mr. America two years in a row. After that, the rule was that you couldn't be a Mr. America contestant if you had already won once.

GS: What titles have you won?

RP: I won my first contest, Mr. Great Britain, in 1949. I was Mr. Universe in 1951, 1958, and 1963.

GS: Why the gaps in between?

RP: Waiting seven year intervals seemed to be good luck for me.

GS: Why did you move from England to South Africa?

RP: I married my wife Marion in 1952. When we began to raise a family, our children did not seem to be thriving in the cold climate of England. At first we considered moving to either California or Hawaii but we finally settled in South Africa in 1958. My wife was from there, so our children would be near their maternal grandparents.

GS: How did your film career come about?

RP: As you know, Steve Reeves had made *Hercules* in Italy, and it became an enormous worldwide success. After that, many other Italian producers wanted to jump on that particular bandwagon.

GS: After his second *Hercules* film, Steve Reeves declined to play the part again. Producer Achille Piazza and director Vittorio Cottafavi got Brooklyn bodybuilder Lou Degna, a.k.a. Mark Forest, to star in *The Vengeance of Hercules*. But for their next film they passed him over in favor of you.

RP: One of the main backers for the production company S.P.A., Cinematografica saw a photo of me in a magazine and had them cable me in South Africa to ask if I would consider testing for the part of *Hercules*. I cabled back that I would if they provided me with a first class plane ticket and first class accommodations in Rome. This was in early December 1960.

On Christmas Eve I got a telegram saying they agreed to my terms and wanted me in Rome on Boxing Day (December 26).



Reg Park, movie star.

GS: Did you have any prior acting experience?

RP: None. I had posed in contests before audiences but that was it. When I arrived at the studio, I was introduced to Burt Nelson. He was a method actor from New York who had studied with Lee Strasberg. He gave me a quick lesson in "the method"...think about something that makes you happy if you are supposed to laugh, think about something sad if you have to cry. I did my screen test with him playing the part Ettore Mannu would eventually play in my first movie.

GS: You made two films with Ettore Mannu. Did you know him well?

RP: Yes. He was a charming person and one of my first friends.

in Rome. Shortly after I arrived, he took me around to his house for a party and there were all of these aristocratic friends of his. I remember a Polish prince was playing the piano. Ettore came from a very upper class family, and he had studied to be an architect. He was a good actor and looked perfect in costume type films. We kept

in touch for many years. He made his last film with Marcello Mastroianni [*City of Women*, 1979].

GS: Did you find acting difficult?

RP: Not particularly. I mostly relied on my instincts. One of the first scenes we shot for *Hercules Conquers Atlantis* (a.k.a. *Hercules and the Captive Women*) was a storm at sea inside the enormous studio tank at Cinecittà. The waves were crashing over us, and the ship's mast cracked and came crashing down. The director got it in one take, and the crew applauded me because I had reacted exactly as the director wanted me to. I was lucky to have had Vittorio Cottafavi for a director on my first film. He was "actor's director" and really worked with me on my performance.

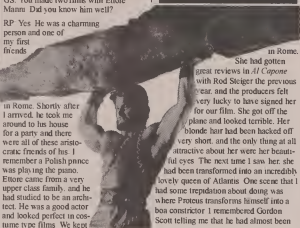
GS: *Hercules Conquers Atlantis* is considerably more polished than many of the other films of its type. The production values are lavish, and it was the only Peplum film that was photographed in 70mm.

RP: I was fortunate to have been signed by S.P.A. Cinematografica, as it was a highly professional organization. Many of the other film companies were rather fly by night.

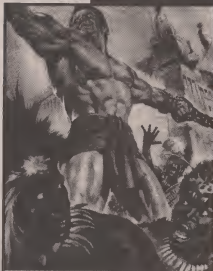
GS: Any other recollections about filming *Hercules Conquers Atlantis*?

RP: I remember the day Fay Spain arrived

Park hefts a stone, preparing to pitch it on a swarm of undead in *Hercules in the Haunted World*.



in Rome. She had gotten great reviews in *Al Capone* with Rod Steiger the previous year, and the producers felt very lucky to have signed her for our film. She got off the plane and looked terrible. Her blonde hair had been hacked off very short, and the only thing at all attractive about her were her beautiful eyes. The next time I saw her, she had been transformed into an incredibly lovely queen of Atlantis. One scene that I had some trepidation about doing was where Proteus transforms himself into a boa constrictor. I remembered Gordon Scott telling me that he had almost been



MACISTE NELLE MINIERE DEL RE SALOMONE

squeezed to death by a boa when he was filming one of his Tarzan pictures. Prior to filming the scene, they put our boa on ice, which made it very lethargic. Then they put it around me, and my body heat rapidly began to revive it. Next time you watch the film you'll notice I throw it off very quickly.

GS: Your next movie, *Hercules in the Haunted World*, was for the same producers.

RP: Yes. They signed me for another picture before we had finished the first one.

GS: This film's main claim to fame is that it was directed by the great Mario Bava, who was better known for his horror movies.

RP: Bava had been the cinematographer on both of Steve Reeves' Hercules films so he was already familiar with this type of movie. *Hercules in the Haunted World* is actually quite horrific, what with Chris Lee as the villain and all those creatures flying around. Mario Bava was outstanding from a technical standpoint. He knew everything about making movies, but he didn't seem that concerned with the actors. He also didn't put up with any levity on the set. Chris Lee was always joking around and trying to make me laugh, but Bava did not find this at all amusing. Giorgio Ardisson, the young actor who played Theseus, was a Vatican Guard before he got into movies. Some of my long shots in this film were doubled by a young Italian bodybuilder named Adriano Bellini. He later starred in films using another name [Kirk Morris].

GS: How long did you live in Rome?

RP: I stayed there on and off for about five years, whenever I was shooting a picture. I returned to South Africa often because of my business concerns there. My wife and I eventually took an apartment in the EUR area, which is a suburb of Rome that was built by Mussolini to celebrate fascism.

GS: During the '60s, the Italian film industry was really thriving. It must have been an exciting time to be there.

RP: I'll always be thankful that I was a part of it. So many of the great stars had come to Italy to make films. While I was there I remember seeing Alan Ladd, Donald O'Connor, Stewart Granger, Stanley Baker, Anthony Quinn and many others at the studio.

GS: Your next film was *Maciste in King Solomon's Mines*.

REG PARK FILMOGRAPHY

1961



*Hercules and the
Captive Women*
a.k.a. *Hercules
Conquers Atlantis*

1962



*Hercules in the
Haunted World*

a.k.a. *Hercules at the
Center of the Earth*

RP: Yes. Some of it was filmed on location in Africa, such as the scene with me fighting a lion.

GS: There is some dispute about who directed this film. Some sources credit Martin Andrews as director and others say it was the screenwriter Piero Regnoli.

RP: To my recollection, it was Piero Regnoli.

GS: Any thoughts about *Ursus, Terror of Kirghizia*?

RP: That was directed by Antonio Margheriti. I believe he went under the name Anthony Dawson. So many Italian filmmakers changed their names it was hard to keep track of who was who. Ettore Manni was in that film too. I think it became a Hercules film in America [*Hercules, Prisoner of Evil*].

GS: Your last film, *Challenge of the Giants*, was never dubbed into English to my knowledge.

RP: This was a patched together production which consisted mostly of footage from my first two Hercules films. The director was Maurizio Lucidi (a.k.a. Maurice Bright) who was an editor on *Hercules Conquers Atlantis*. He used this film to get his directing career off the ground. The one memorable scene is my fight with Giovanni Cianfiglia, who had been a stunt double for Steve Reeves.

GS: Why did you give up acting after this film?

RP: The era of the strongmen movies was coming to an end and I had never been all that keen on acting to begin

WHAT SADISTIC SECRET DID THESE WOMEN POSSESS?



HERCULES and the CAPTIVE WOMEN

STARRING REG PARK • FAY SPAIN

A Warner Bros. Production

with. I already had a successful career in South Africa, and although acting provided me with a lucrative second income, it was never something I wanted to make my life's work. But it is a time of my life that I recall fondly and enjoy reminiscing about. ■

[For more information on Reg Park, the reader is directed to *Cult Movies* issue no. 13]

Print ad from the *Hercules and the Captive Women* pressbook.

REG PARK FILMOGRAPHY

Muciste in King Solomon's Mines a.k.a. *Samson in King Solomon's Mines*

1963



1964



Hercules, Prisoner of Evil a.k.a. *Ursus, Terror of Kirghizia*

1965



Hercules the Avenger a.k.a. *Challenge of the Giants*

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A NEW FACE FOR 'EVIL'



SPECIAL ARTICLE BY TERRY PACE

In the 43 years since its screen premiere, Orson Welles' dark, sinister *'Touch of Evil'* has been championed by Welles admirers around the world as one of the maverick director's most stunning and provocative works.

Yet the various, often drastically different prints of *'Touch of Evil'* that circulated in movie theaters, on television and on videotape for four frustrating decades offered audiences only a dim, deceptive view of Welles' true cinematic intentions.

Then, in 1998, a team of gifted screen artists and faithful Welles devotees translated a now-legendary Hollywood document into a stunning new version of *'Touch of Evil.'*

Working with a detailed, passionately written 58-page memo penned by the movie's larger-than-life director, writer and star,

producer Rick Schmidlin and Oscar-winning editor Walter Murch (whose impressive credits range from *'The Godfather'* to *'The English Patient'*) made some 50 editing changes originally suggested by Welles but largely ignored by his studio before the movie was relegated to a dismal 1958 release on the bottom half of a double bill.

"The new version is not a restoration, and it's not a director's cut—it's a reconfiguration," stressed Welles historian and *'Midnight Movies'* author Jonathan Rosenbaum, who worked as a consultant on the celebrated *'Touch of Evil'* project. "Those terms are banded about quite a lot in Hollywood for anything and everything, and they're very often words to mistrust. To call it a director's cut would be a lie. There never can be a

director's cut of *'Touch of Evil'* because Welles wasn't able to finish his work."

Welles wrote the historic memo after viewing the studio's reassembled cut of *'Touch of Evil,'* including additional "clarifying" footage shot by another director, Harry Keller. Shortly after delivering his own rough cut to the studio, Welles had left the United States for Mexico, where he was working on his long-cherished screen version of Cervantes' *'Don Quixote.'* Welles returned to find that his bold, unconventional film-noir thriller in which he transformed a lurid, unsettling labyrinth of drugs, murder, political corruption, personal betrayal and sexual perversity into a dazzling cinematic masterwork had been carelessly butchered by irresponsible studio executives at Universal.

"When he came back from his trip in Mexico, they had a cut to show to him," explained Rosenbaum, who reviews films for *The Chicago Reader* and also edited *'This Is Orson Welles,'* a fascinating book-length collection of conversations between Welles and fellow filmmaker Peter Bogdanovich. "After he saw it, he sat down and wrote this memo. It's almost his last word on what he thought they should do to make the film they had better. It's wrong to think that Welles had a perfect *'Touch of Evil'* in his mind when he wrote this memo. He wasn't asking them to let him go back and completely re-cut the film the way he would have made it. What the memo suggested, in a sense, was a mop-up operation. The studio didn't ignore everything in the memo, but they ignored more than half of it."

Rosenbaum, who had uncovered a copy of about two-thirds of Welles' original memo, first intended to include the document as an appendix to *'This Is Orson Welles,'* issued by Harper-Collins in 1992. Due to length considerations, the publisher eventually decided to eliminate the memo from the book's final edition. Rosenbaum would later publish excerpts from the memo, along with his own commentary, in fall 1992 issues of the film periodicals *Trafic* and *Film Quarterly*. Once published, the intriguing document attracted the attention of Welles aficionados and frequent Steven Spielberg cinematographer Allen Daviau (*'E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial,'* *'Empire of the Sun'*), who then passed it along to Schmidlin.

"Rick developed the idea on his own and decided to try to get Universal interested in using the suggestions in the memo to do a new version of the film," recalled Rosenbaum, whose books include *'Moving Places,'* *'Placing Movies,'* *'Movie Wars,'* *'Movies as Politics'* and other works of film commentary and criticism. "I thought this was kind of like a pipe dream. I didn't think Universal was ever going to go along with it. It's the first time, in effect, that a studio has ever admitted it was wrong. Also, of course, it's a case of a studio deciding it could make money because it was wrong."



Janet Leigh and Charlton Heston on the set

After a year's worth of discussions, Universal decided to proceed with the unusual project. Schumlin, who agreed to produce, secured the prestigious services of Murch to face the tricky challenge of re-editing the sound work and cinematography. In the meantime, Rosenbaum—who consented to serve as a consultant on the unexpected endeavor—managed to locate a complete copy of Welles' elusive 58-page memo.

"After my article appeared in *Film Quarterly*, I got a letter from Charlton Heston, who had starred in the film," Rosenbaum remarked. "It was a very nice letter, saying that my account of what happened was accurate and matched what he remembered about the whole thing. In the letter he said, 'I remember that movie. I still have a copy of it in my files.' It turned out the copy he had was the entire original memo."

To supplement that pivotal document, the team collected more than 1,000 pages of scripts, additional notes, production memos, continuity reports, copies of the original editor's cue sheets and other archival material. Through it all, their central blueprint remained Welles' ill-fated, last-ditch appeal to the studio.

"In the memo, Welles is trying his best to be non-confrontational, but it's also clear that he's very upset," Rosenbaum revealed. "It varies in tone and varies in how effective it is. Generally you feel that he's trying to get himself listened to, but you also feel his frustration over the whole thing. All of the suggestions he made were in the interest of clarification for the audience. The whole point of the memo was to make this a more commercial movie, and he was right. Every suggestion he made was in the interest of clarification. The new version is an attempt to carry out Welles' instructions and see what might have happened had the studio listened to him. A few of the cuts couldn't be made without creating a rather jarring effect, but I would say we were able to fill about 95 percent of those suggestions. A couple of other minor changes weren't actually in the memo, but I would say they were in the spirit of Welles."

Welles' involvement in "Touch of Evil" marked the brilliant, unpredictable filmmaker's return to the Hollywood studios for the first time in a long, disheartening decade. His landmark "Citizen Kane" had

premiered in 1941, after RKO gave the 25-year-old maestro of theater (where his innovations included an all-black, voodoo-themed Harlem production of "Macbeth") and radio (where his infamous "Panic Broadcast" of H.G. Wells' "The War of the Worlds" terrorized the nation) cart-blanc control over what proved to be his revolutionary screen debut.

"I started at the top," Welles was famous for saying later in his life, "and I've been working my way down ever since."

Starting with his second RKO feature—a brilliantly conceived but ill-fated realization of Booth Tarkington's novel "The Magnificent Ambersons"—Welles watched in helpless, heartbreaking defeat as one cherished feature after another was taken out of his hands by the Hollywood powers-that-be. Retreating to Europe near the end of the '40s, Welles worked relentlessly as an actor (mostly in roles and projects beneath his artistic abilities) in order to provide bit-by-bit financing for various independent projects abroad. Those 10 troubling years produced a globetrotting, patchwork version of Shakespeare's "Othello" (1952), the hopelessly mangled "Mr. Arkadin" (1955) and his beloved but incomplete "Don Quixote."

"More than anything, Welles wanted the opportunity to make a lot of films," Rosenbaum contends. "He had hoped, working in Hollywood again, that 'Touch of Evil' would get him a studio contract. Originally he had a lot of enthusiasm working on the film, but then, as usual, things deteriorated between him and the studio. How much of that is due to the studio and how much is due to Welles' own quirks is hard to say. He tended to get along very well with the people who worked beside him on his films—the actual hands-on people who helped him make the films—but he didn't get along so well with the studio heads and the middle-management people."

Universal, a studio long known for its steady, reliable output of B-movies, intended "Touch of Evil" as a routine exploitation thriller based on Whit Masterson's pulp novel, "Badge of Evil." Welles had just acted in an unremarkable Universal potboiler called "Man in the Shadow" when he was offered the role of the villain in the Masterson crime drama. Around the same time, Universal was trying to lure hot young box-office property Charlton Heston—who was then between his historic starring role in Cecil B. DeMille's epic "The Ten Commandments" (1956) and his Oscar-winning turn in William Wyler's "Ben-Hur" (1959)—into accepting the pivotal role of the "Badge of Evil" hero.

"When someone from the studio called," Heston remembered, "I told them I was interested and asked who was directing. I told them, 'Police stories are like Westerns. You've been making them for years, and all the good ideas have been used. In order for this to work,

you've got to have a good director. They said, 'We don't have a director yet. But we do have Orson Welles to play the heavy.' There was silence for a moment, and I said, 'Why don't you let him direct it? He's a pretty good director, you know. Then there was an, 'Um yeah. "Citizen Kane" and all that. Interesting idea. We'll get back to you. I'd say one of my central contributions to the art of film was shaming the studio into hiring Orson Welles to direct his last Hollywood picture.'

Welles quickly accepted the assignment, but only on the condition that he be allowed to rewrite the lackluster script by studio writer Paul Monash. The end result, retitled "Touch of Evil," was set in an eerie, squalid little town on the border between the United States and Mexico (the movie was filmed on suitably seedy and decaying locations in Venice, Calif.). The story begins as honeymooners Mike Vargas (Heston), a high-ranking narcotics official with the Mexican government, and his blonde American bride Susan (Janet Leigh) embark on an evening stroll across the border into the United States on a simple search for a chocolate shake. Meanwhile, a car crossing the border at the same time suddenly explodes on the American side, killing a ruthless, power-wielding American businessman and his young girlfriend.

Those characters and events are introduced in the justifiably famous opening of "Touch of Evil" — a dazzling three-minute, 17-second single tracking shot that, as presented now, marks one of the most striking and noticeable changes in the newly restructured film. Following Welles' instructions, distracting credits and the overwrought opening-titles music by composer Henry Mancini have been removed from the sequence, allowing audiences to appreciate Welles' trailblazing blend of audacious camerawork and ambient sound at its full intended effect.

"What changes is that it's not as much of a suspense sequence, but there are a lot of other things the sequence can do that it didn't do before," Rosenbaum observed. "The credits have been moved to the end of the film, but the opening music isn't used there. The music over the end credits comes from a portion of the original score that wasn't used in the film."

Not surprisingly, Welles wrote the ripest acting role in "Touch of Evil" for himself. Padding his already massive frame, applying heavy makeup to his pudgy face and donning a putty nose, the once-dashing actor plays corrupt American police detective Hank Quinlan — a bitter, bigoted, morally bankrupt abuser of the law who plants evidence in order to ensure convictions. As French director and Welles admirer Francois Truffaut once noted, Welles the actor reveals the "angel within the beast, the heart in the monster, the secret of the tyrant." The grotesque Quinlan — whose one true love, his late wife, was the victim of a killer who escaped justice — was once a man of



Marlene Dietrich

dignity and character and a great detective. Welles uses the sleazy, disturbing film-noir world of "Touch of Evil" to dramatize Quinlan's tragic descent and ultimate downfall.

"I decided that, since I was doing a melodrama," Welles told Bogdanovich, "I'd do one about good and evil, and it's a quite simple statement of what I considered to be good and evil. Spelled right out for everybody."

The conflict begins once Vargas, who happens to witness the explosion, correctly concludes that the lethal bomb must have been planted on the Mexican side of the border. Separated from his wife on their wedding night, the morally upright Mexican official is about to appear as the key witness in the trial of a notorious Mexican drug dealer named Grandi. Vargas insists on observing Quinlan's investigation once the overbearing lawman (who relies on "intuition" instead of evidence) begins using questionable methods to pin the murder on Sanchez, a young Mexican shoe clerk who's involved in an affair with the victim's daughter.

"Walter sent me a work print early on, and there were two things in it that I objected to," Rosenbaum explained. "One was just a mistake, which was corrected. At one point you hear Quinlan punch Sanchez in the

stomach while he's talking about police work in the old days. In the print I saw, that was missing. The reason is because Walter was using material from the release version, and that was not in the release version. But it's important conceptually because we find out later that Sanchez has been interrogated and beaten for hours. On the phone, Quinlan tells Menzies, 'Keep after him. Break him. The fact we hear him earlier punch Sanchez in the stomach suggests a lot of dark things. That detail is very important.'

While Vargas labors to expose Quinlan's corruption, Susan is taken to an eerie, out-of-the-way motel (in a rather startling sequence that foreshadows Alfred Hitchcock's "Psycho" two years later, complete with a lunatic clerk played by Dennis Weaver). Once she's alone, insidious agents of the Grandis (on orders from their Uncle Joe, played to comic-heavy perfection by Welles favorite Akim Tamiroff) terrorize Susan and frame her as a drug addict in a desperate attempt to discredit Vargas. In the new version, Welles' intended system of crosscutting is utilized to clarify time elements and emphasize the interweaving stories of Vargas' campaign against Quinlan and the Grandis' brutal attack on Susan's motel room.

"The only conceptual difference I had with Walter's work centered on a single detail that Welles gave a great deal of attention to in the

memo," Rosenbaum noted. "The issue revolved around the first scene between Janet Leigh and Akim Tamaroff. Welles wanted that cut into two different sequences. In the studio cut, it ran as one sequence, with no cutaways. Welles wanted it cut into two, to show how it related to everything that was happening with Vargas and Quinlan. Walter cut it into three parts, cutting away twice. That made it very smooth, and it played very well, but it was too smooth. In the memo, Welles noted that the scene was supposed to have a disturbing quality. But because of that crosscutting, it didn't function as a scene. It lost much of that disturbing quality that Welles wanted. I suggested that change to Walter. He agreed and did it and never complained."

The turning point in the story occurs once Quinlan's fawning, devoted right-hand man - an honest underling cop named Menzies (veteran character actor Joseph Calleia, in a sensitive, powerful performance) - uncovers evidence against his godlike hero and reluctantly decides to help Vargas in his righteous crusade.

"One of the things I learned in doing this is that you can't make any change in editing without affecting other things," Rosenbaum noted. "A good example of that is a crucial cut, which seems like a very simple cut, in the Hall of Records sequence between Menzies and Vargas, where Vargas is digging up records of the cases where Quinlan has planted evidence or used unquestionable methods in order to get a conviction.

"Originally it was a large close-up of Menzies, an unflattering shot with a wide-angle lens," he explained. "Welles requested it be cut. But in order to do that, you have to cut all sorts of things around it where Menzies grabs the paper from Vargas, tears it up and then sits down at the table. All of that had to go. When that change was made, it totally transformed the resonance of that character. Menzies comes across in this version much more heroically. In all the other versions, he comes across as a defeated man who gives in to Vargas simply because he has kind of given up. Now you feel that he's made the decision out of principles, and it's all because of the removal of that one shot."

The new version of "Touch of Evil," released in theaters in the fall of 1998, earned a number of prestigious critics' awards and was recently issued by Universal on home video and DVD. The disc includes the text of the famous memo, although legal entanglements prevented the company from releasing a critically acclaimed documentary on the movie's amazing rebirth. Still, the DVD is well worth owning for the sake of a clean, crisp, widescreen presentation of this remarkable reconfiguration. In addition to the memo, the DVD also includes production notes, cast and filmmaker credits and the movie's original theatrical trailer.

"It looks better than ever, and I think Orson

would be so pleased," Leigh enthused. "I've always been grateful to him for a number of reasons. For one thing, working with him was such a thrill. Plus, I've always suspected that Alfred Hitchcock must have seen me in that role before he cast me as Marion in 'Psycho.' Many people over the years have noted the parallels between those two films. In both, I end up in grave danger, very scantily clad, terrorized in a lonely, isolated motel room, at the mercy of a weird and kooky motel attendant. Hitch and I never talked about it, but in the back of my mind I've always thought 'Touch of Evil' might have helped me get the role in 'Psycho.' Today they're the two roles I'm remembered for the most."

and the reconfigured version - should remain in circulation.

"There can never be a definitive 'Touch of Evil,'" Rosenbaum insists. "That's why I think all of the major versions should remain in circulation for people to see. Together these different versions of 'Touch of Evil' show how this film developed at Universal from the beginning of things in 1957 up until now. A lot of people consider it a big tactical mistake that Welles left Hollywood and wasn't there to influence what they did when they cut the film. But one could also argue that by that stage he had lost control and was never going to be able to regain it."

After "Touch of Evil," Welles returned to



Welles historian Jonathon Rosenbaum and Author Terry Pace

Hitchcock's daughter Pat, who played Leigh's fellow secretary in the opening scenes of "Psycho," tends to agree with her co-star's theory.

"My father watched other director's films when he was casting," Hitchcock explained. "When he was considering a particular actor for a role, he would usually study that actor's recent work - so he watched a lot of movies when he was casting. I know that he was a great admirer of Orson Welles, and 'Touch of Evil' had probably just come out about the time he bought the rights to 'Psycho.' So I'd say it's quite possible that 'Touch of Evil' was one of the movies he watched before he cast Janet as Marion."

With a new "Touch of Evil" now on the market, Rosenbaum believes all of the existing versions of Welles' singular work - the studio preview version, the final release version, a longer version released on video in the 1970s

Europe, completing only a handful of films (a version of Franz Kafka's "The Trial," plus the Shakespearean masterpiece "Chimes at Midnight") before his untimely death in 1985, at the age of 70. In spite of his heartfelt desire to return from exile, Welles would never again direct a film in Hollywood following his dispiriting experience with "Touch of Evil."

"It's his last Hollywood film," Rosenbaum concluded. "It's curious that he would risk leaving Hollywood, where he was hoping to be embraced by the studio system, and go to Mexico to work on a totally independent film like 'Don Quixote.' But part of what was so exciting about Welles, but was also so unbankable about him, was that he never did the same thing twice. One could blame it all on Hollywood. One could blame it all on Welles.

It's a little bit of both."

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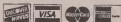
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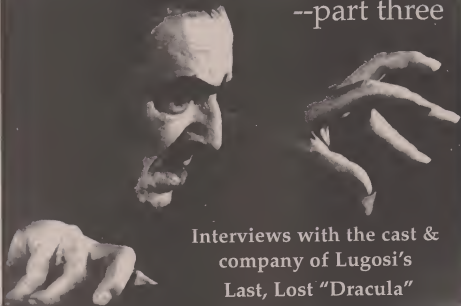
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Dracula's Last Hurrah

--part three



Interviews with the cast &
company of Lugosi's
Last, Lost "Dracula"

By Frank J. Dello Stritto & Andi Brooks

(The interviews transcribed below were conducted by the authors in preparing their book, *Vampire: Over London - Bela Lugosi in Britain*, which Cult Movies Press is now proud to offer. Information for ordering the book is provided at the end of this article.)

In Part 1 and 2 of this series, we report our interviews with the surviving cast members of Bela Lugosi's last stage tour of *Dracula* in Britain in 1951. Contrary to most published accounts, the tour was not a failure that closed after a few performances. Lugosi's farewell to his great role played more than 200 performances as it crisscrossed the British Isles for six months. The tour and Lugosi in particular received generally fine reviews.

Our interviews with the cast members—Richard Butler and John Martin (who both played Jonathan Harker), Eric Lindsay (Renfield), Sheila Wynn (Lucy Seward), Joan Wrenall and Joan Harding (both played Wells the Maid)—provided rich detail on the tour itself and on working with the Lugosi. To complete the story we wanted to find the decision makers behind the scenes.

Through a letter published in *The Stage*, the made

journal of British theatre, we managed to locate Richard Eastham, *Dracula*'s director, living in retirement east of London. Retirement has not slowed him down at all, and "Dickie," as everyone calls him, showed the quickness of mind and movement that the cast members recalled.

Dickie Eastham was born in Stockport. He hailed from a theatrical family; his grandparents were third generation vaudevillians. As a young boy he was often taken to plays, one of them a 1928 production of *Dracula* performed by Hamilton Deane's company. By then Dickie had decided on a career in theatre. A small, dynamic man of many talents, Dickie took up directing, and showed a talent for whipping an amorphous company into shape and getting a show into production. That talent was prized by the many actors he worked with, including by 1951 John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh. Dickie's wartime stint in the army ended with an assignment in Germany to restore damaged opera houses, and gave him first hand experience in a rich theatre culture cut off from Britain since the 1930s. On returning to London, Dickie worked

as a writer at Rank Studios, and then returned to theatre and his special love, English pantomime.

Frank interviewed Eastham, at his home east of London on July 25, 1999:

Frank Dello Stritto: How did you get involved in *Dracula*?

Richard Eastham: I had known John Mather, the producer, for some years. John had been a stage director in the West End. In the 1940s, I travelled a lot, and whenever I was in London, I shared John's flat on Percy Street off Tottenham Court Road. So, when I got back to London in March 1951, John called me right away, and asked if I would direct *Dracula*.
FDS: Got back from where?

RE: Oh, I had been abroad almost a year. About seven months touring North America as stage director of the Sadler Wells Theatre Ballet. Then I spent the winter in Halifax and Newfoundland, directing plays and pantomime.

FDS: Do you remember what you were paid for Dracula?

RE: A flat £100. Directors usually received a percentage of the receipts, but I was doing it more out of friendship. John called and said "You'll do this for me, won't you?" So for £100, I would bring Dracula through rehearsals and its opening.

FDS: Did you have anything to do with the tour after it opened?

RE: No, not really. I met with the cast the day after the opening, and went through my notes. That was pretty much my farewell. That's when Bela gave me this picture (a postcard sized portrait, autographed in red ink, "To Dick with appreciation - Bela.")

FDS: What did you think of Deane & Balderson's play?

RE: When I read it, I was surprised how old-fashioned it was. But the big problem is that it was rather short—about an hour and ten to twenty minutes. Audiences expected a full evening—curtain up at 7.30 and certainly not getting out before 9.00. I padded it with longer speeches. I tried to steer it away from Victorian melodrama. With two very long breaks, the entire performance was about 205 minutes.

FDS: Hamilton Deane was still living in London then. Was he ever asked to play Van Helsing?

RE: No, it never came up. He never contacted us, and we didn't contact him.

FDS: Did you have anything to do with the sets?

RE: Oh, yes. Dracula was produced on the cheap. Bertram Tyrer and I scouted around theatre shops for old scenery. Bertram was a genius. He dabbled in many things, set design was only one of them. He could paint with either hand. He repainted the sets we bought—they looked very good, but definitely on the cheap.

FDS: There were only two weeks of rehearsals. Was that enough?

RE: Two weeks was too short. But it was an absolute luxury compared to the 6 days or so I usually had to work with in stock companies. I had to churn out a play a week. So, two weeks was not too bad.

FDS: Where were the rehearsals?

RE: They were above a pub on Pont Street. John and I arranged for Bela and Lillian to have a flat nearby on Chesham Place. Both were near Routledge & White's office on Knightsbridge. That's where John worked out of.

FDS: Tell me about your first meeting with Bela.

RE: Oh, that's a bit of a story. There was nothing planned for him on his first night in town. I forget why. So, the next night, I took Bela and Lillian to dinner. I wanted to talk to them alone about what I was doing with the

play. Sometimes older actors get very suspicious when someone tinkers with a play they know really well. We went to my favorite restaurant in London, the Leu de France. I noticed for the first time that Bela was a big man, with a big chest, but still he looked rather frail. He was also hard of hearing—not chronically, but noticeable. I was wondering how to break the ice, but Bela did it for me. "Dickie," he said in that deep accent, "I don't like the toilet paper in your country—it doesn't soak up the manure very well." We all laughed, and I sensed then that there would be no problems between Bela and me. While we ate, I assured Bela that though I was adding to the play, none of his scenes had been altered. His entrances and exits would be exactly as they always were. Bela just ate his dinner. "No problem, my dear boy" was all he said. Lillian was not so sure. She was very protective. I thought I handled the changes well, lengthening the play but not disturbing Bela's part. I wrote a prologue. Before the first curtain, Sheila stood between two sheets of gauze—a clear sheet and a sheet with a large bat imprinted on it. Bela would stand behind the sheets in mist.

FDS: What was your opinion of Lillian?

RE: Lillian was very nice, very quiet. She was very protective, but very much in the background, not overt. Lillian was not happy with some things. She had opinions, but always handled them tactfully. Appearance-wise, Emma Thompson and Edwina Curry remind me a bit of Lillian. Lillian and John never got along. Well, while we were eating that night, the sommelier passed. He was Hungarian—we all thought he was French, but it turned out he was Hungarian. He all but fell to his knees. "Mr. Lugosi!" He had seen Bela on stage in Hungary long, long ago as Hamlet. I dined with Bela and Lillian a lot during the month we worked together.

FDS: What else did you do to prepare the production?

RE: As soon as I took the job, I recruited two men specifically: David Dawson as Seward and Alfred Beale as business manager. They would be the solid backbone of the company. Alfred Beale was a lovely man. Alfred was exactly what you wanted in a business manager—solid and by-the-book. When we first met, he was general manager of the Harry Hanson Corp. Players in Peterborough, where I did a turn as resident director. Alfred always helped me in dealing with Harry. David Dawson was an Australian, a tall man about 6'2" and in his mid-forties. I had worked with him in War & Peace at the Unity Theatre. Between acting jobs, he worked as a "supply teacher" (editor's note: roughly equal to substitute teacher or adjunct faculty in America). I got him a good salary, £40 per week I think. But I wanted a good solid actor in that part. Seward is more important to holding things together in the

play than most people realize. Otherwise, I was involved in casting and had opinions, but left the final decisions to John. I was not particularly keen on Sheila Wynn as Lucy—her long auburn hair was good for the part, but I would have preferred a leaner girl. But John and George Routledge were very keen on having her. Except for Eric Lindsay and David Dawson, I felt the cast did not "believe" in the material. Of course Joan Winmill was deathly afraid of Bela—both onstage and off. David played it perfectly straight, and Eric was full-blown into his part. He pantomimed catching flies in mid-air, and the gimmick worked great.

FDS: What do you remember about the dress rehearsal?

RE: Dress rehearsal was definitely Sunday, as the theatre had a show in on Saturday. Bela used some Americanisms when he spoke. I did not always get them at first try. Bela's spoke of playing Dracula in "full evening dress." I did not know at first that he meant white tie and tails. But that's what I had expected anyhow. Megs Jenkins (editor's note: a well known stage actress, and wife of John Mather's business partner, George Routledge) sat next to me through the rehearsal. I had known her since my days at Rank Studios. She learned over and said, "This is pretty poor." She was right. The performance held together but just barely. It was flat, dull, lumpy. I was depressed about it. Opening night was somewhat better.

FDS: Was Bela in the coffin for the final scene?

RE: He was definitely not in the coffin. It was a dummy. We might not have gotten him erect for the curtain calls. But Bela himself suggested that he do the closing monologue, that Van Helsing is supposed to give. He said that he always did it when he played in the States. That worked very well.

After his month with Dracula Dickie Eastham continued his theatre career until the 1960s, when he joined John Mather, who then headed the London office of the William Morris talent agency. John handled film work and Dickie concentrated on theatre. He tells wonderful stories of shepherding American stars with their Hollywood-size egos through British and European theatre.

Dickie provided us with John Mather's phone number. John was everyone's boss on the Dracula tour, and we needed to talk with him to have the complete story of 1951.

John Chartres Mather had been in theatre since age 12. Taking his lead from Mickey Rooney-Judy Garland musicals, the young man staged local revues in his native Edinburgh. After a year as stagehand in Dundee repertory, he took on London. Through the war years, he launched musical revues to entertain British troops. John also did revues as stage director on the road and on the West End. By the late 1940s, still in his

FDS: What about Routledge & White?

JCM: They were my partners in Chartres Productions, but they never had much to do with *Dracula*. George Routledge liked the idea, as I recall, but he wasn't interested in investing in it or working on it. Gordon White thought it was a terrible idea—didn't think it would succeed at all. He thought we were crazy, but he handled the negotiations to contract Bela.

FDS: All the programs for *Dracula* mention Routledge & White very prominently.

JCM: Well, they were my partners, and we used the same office, so I put their names on the programs. But they really didn't have much to do with it. Gordon White quit the business and worked with Jimmy Hanson when he set up the Hanson Trust. Gordon died a few years ago in California, a very wealthy man. George Routledge had some legal and money problems and left the business a few years after *Dracula*. He lives in Denmark now.

FDS: Was Lee Ephraim a backer?

JCM: No, he wasn't. I knew Lee well, and his partner Betty Farmer. I had worked for Lee on *Waltz Time* and Lee had been a backer on *Out Of This World*.

FDS: How about Nigel Ballantine?

JCM: Oh, no! Nigel was in jail by then!

FDS: In jail?

JCM: He ran off with the leading lady and all the money from one of his productions, and got caught.

FDS: What was your impression of Bela?

JCM: I met Bela and Lillian when they landed in Southampton. Bela looked as if he were going to die. He always looked that way. Bela was very charming, very humble, not conceited in the least. For the first 2 or 3 days of rehearsals, he only walked through his part. I was wondering about cancelling the whole thing. On the third day, Dickie Eastham asked the cast to do their read-throughs in character. Bela stood straight and awed everyone. Bela had always looked like a tired old man—very gray, very old and bent, years older than his actual age. He spoke very slowly, softly and mumbled a bit. This all changed when he was onstage—the transformation was complete. He looked 40 again, erect and towering. When he was *Dracula*, he had this twinkle in his eye. He was so charming, and then so evil. It was magnificent.

FDS: Tell me about your first meeting with Bela.

JCM: I think Dickie and me both went to Southampton to meet Bela and Lillian. I put them into a hired limousine and hurried ahead to London. I had the flat stocked with goodies, and a bottle of champagne waiting. I had made a reservation at Carlton Towers, a table by the window for 6:00. Lillian said "No, Bela's tired and he's going straight to bed." We dined there later, several times, and it became a favorite of theirs.



FDS: I have been warned that you and Lillian didn't always see eye to eye.

JCM: Oh, she was awful! Awful! She loathed me. It was mutual loathing from the first day.

FDS: Well, I must say that everyone else on the tour speaks well of her.

JCM: Really? Well, she was an extraordinary woman, but a pain-in-the-ass. She took notes through the rehearsals, and interfered. I had it out with her once. After that, she sat in the back of the stalls; but still kept those notes. Lillian looked tough and was a strong woman, physically. At dress rehearsal, a hamper was in the way. Lillian lifted it and set it on the table. I went and looked inside—it was filled with books and files. I was curious and nudged it to check its weight, and wondered if I could have lifted it. Lillian seemed desperately unhappy. I think she had a terrible inferiority complex. She had a stident voice, heavy Chicago accent. Nothing ever pleased her—in restaurants and the theatre, anywhere. She browbeat Bela, who just seemed to tune her out and accept it. She was

blither about how Bela was treated—Hollywood had once been at his feet, studios phoning constantly, but now they shunned him.

FDS: Again, the company members we've talked to have quite different memories of her. If anything, they think Bela controlled her life.

JCM: I think Lillian bullied Bela, a bit—treated him like a child. At dinner she did everything but cut his meat. She sent food back in restaurants. I think Bela was used to this, since he just munched away. She was always at the side of the stage—every night. Something was always wrong that she'd complain about.

[Author's Note: In our follow-up interviews, we pressed Dickie Eastham on John Mather's memories of Lillian. Dickie stands by his much more favorable memories of Lillian, but strongly confirms that John and Lillian simply never got along. "It was chemical," Dickie told us, "it started as soon as they met." Lillian undoubtedly could be fiercely protective of Bela. John, as the producer of a tour that was not quite what Bela and Lillian expected, saw a side of that affection that few others did.)

FDS: I have to ask you something directly. There has always been a persistent claim that Bela was never paid for the *Dracula* tour.

JCM: Oh, he was definitely paid. Everyone actor in every show I ever produced was paid. I treated Bela and Lillian well. I didn't want them saying anything negative like that about me. I couldn't survive long in this business with people saying I didn't pay them.

FDS: Any special memories of Bela?

JCM: Bela was always marvelous, once you got to know him. At our first meeting in Southampton, I thought he looked so feeble and I really feared for the production, but he never let us down. I dined out with them often, especially during rehearsals in April. I always watched Bela's intake of alcohol. I did that with all the stars of my shows. He never drank that much in front of me. Lillian saw that he didn't. Before dinner, I would go to their flat on Chesham Road to pick them up. Once, while Lillian got ready, Bela sat me down on the sofa, and brought out a huge scrapbook of old clippings. They were from his days in Hungary. They were all in Hungarian of course, and I couldn't read anything but Bela's name in the headline. They were obvious rave reviews. Bela went through them one by one. It was very important to him, I think, for me to know about his days before *Dracula*.

FDS: Do you have any memories of the rehearsals?

JCM: The rehearsals started in bare rooms above the pub on Pont Street. For the second week, we moved to the Duke of York Theatre. It had a one-set play on at the time. So, we could rehearse during the day, and put the set back in place before the performance. It was a courtesy that theatres extended to productions in rehearsal. I was at some rehearsals, but only to observe. Dickie and I would meet afterwards to discuss how it was going. If there was any problem, I would talk to Bela about it over dinner. But things went smoothly enough.

FDS: How about the dress rehearsals?

JCM: That's a different story. Things didn't go well. The effects did not work. The smoke took seven seconds to get through the pipes. Too much smoke and the house was filled. Too little and it had no effect. Bela had to disappear in the smoke—no smoke and he was left standing there. It took forever to work out. Lighting effects were a bit difficult—but nothing compared to the musicals I had produced. Those were really complex. So, I thought *Dracula* would go pretty smoothly. But it didn't. Strand Electric—that's where I got the equipment from—was supposed to send a man down to Brighton for the week, but never did. I was very annoyed. We kept the cast until two in the morning, working through the lighting effects. We let the cast go to get some rest. The rest of the company stayed until eight in the morning. Dickie and

I went to breakfast and commiserated. But we got them straight, and the opening went well. The reviews were fine.

FDS: You had your own lighting equipment? Wouldn't the theatre have that?

JCM: Yes, we had our own. We had to. On tour, you never know what the theatres have. So, we had to be able to do it ourselves.

FDS: How did the tour do?

JCM: *Dracula* had too high a weekly expense to make money on the road. I had to get it into the West End, and didn't. So, I lost money. Not a lot. Some weeks, it made money, some weeks it didn't. *Dracula* was not cheap to produce. There was Bela's salary. There were nurses at every performance; so St. John's Ambulance had to be paid a contribution. There were 3 or 4 musicians every week to play at the intermissions. We had long intermissions, and had to fill them with something.

FDS: How was the company to deal with?

JCM: It was a nice company—not much trouble, not many complaints. Whenever the tour was near London, I would catch the show to check on things. I'd circulate around the dressing rooms talking to everyone I could. It was a good cast. Most of the problems mentioned to me, I referred to Alfred Beale, so as not to usurp his authority.

FDS: So, Beale was in charge on the road?

JCM: Yes, he would call me every night to report on the box office and the performance. He was a good man and a good business director. He had a good heart. He'd be tough with the company when he had to be, but then he'd apologize and undo whatever good he had done. But he was a good manager and I was glad to have him.

FDS: The programs list a Douglas Bodkin as publicity manager. We've been looking for him. Do you have any memories of him?

JCM: Not really. He was the advance publicity man. He did all his work Mondays and Tuesdays—lining up the publicity, arranging for a few things. But I didn't know him well then, and I've heard nothing about him since.

FDS: The programs also list a W. H. Williams as your co-producer. What about him?

JCM: Bill Williams was the head of Merton Park Studios. He was more of a backer than a producer, but I felt I owed him something, so I billed him as co-producer. Bill invested in *Dracula* and has also put money into *Out of This World*. He supplied the smoke machine and the bat that you've heard so much about. Honestly, I hadn't heard any of the stories about them breaking down until I spoke to you. By the way, I do remember that my sister, Rosemary, attended a theatre garden party with Bela. For some reason, Lillian couldn't go, so my sister went with him.

FDS: Theatre garden party?

JCM: There were theatre garden parties and movie garden parties. They would be held on

large outdoor lawns. Shepperton Studios lot was a typical place. People would go and meet actors and actresses. Stars would sit at tables and sign autographs. Sometimes they would be driven to different sites through the day. For producers, they were a bit of a nuisance, but a good place to show off actors. Rank studios always paraded out its starlets. I remember I saw Honor Blackman and Joan Collins at these parties. You can speak to my sister about her day with Bela.

FDS: How close did you come to getting *Dracula* into the West End?

JCM: Very close. The Garrick wanted us after its current play closed, but that play—I forget what it was—hung on and on. I also had discussions with the Duke of York and The Ambassador, and they were very interested. If we could have kept the tour going, I would have gotten it into one of them.

FDS: Why did the tour end?

JCM: Touring is hard work, and I never planned that we would tour for six months. Late in the tour, I received a call from Alfred Beale, "I'm a bit worried about Bela," he said, "He came on in Act III, and started with Act I dialogue." I went and met with Bela, and realized how tired he was. You see, he always looked so tired offstage but was always so good on stage. I had just learned to ignore it, but he was really exhausted. We were discussing some details in his dressing room when Lillian came in. "It's late," she said. She took out some sort of kit, and gave Bela an injection. "You know, he's diabetic." I knew that wasn't true. I had heard about some kind of injections, but didn't think much about it, since Bela was always so good onstage.

FDS: Is that when you decided to end the tour?

JCM: No, but I didn't quite know what to do. I still kept looking for bookings for the tour, and had lined up a few dates near Newcastle & Liverpool, but Lillian said, "Oh, don't put us up there again." She wanted to keep the travelling to a minimum. Two or three weeks later I visited Bela backstage in Derby. Lillian wasn't there. I told Bela that we had to play those dates or not play at all. He looked at me a long time. "John, I can't go on," he said, "It's taking too much out of me. Please finish it quickly." I put up the closing notices that week.

FDS: But you played Portsmouth two weeks later.

JCM: Yes, I had already signed for that week, and I had to give the company two weeks notice. Those were the rules. Portsmouth was a bad week at the box office.

FDS: When was the last time you saw Bela?

JCM: I visited them after the tour ended, before he started filming the movie he made. He still looked very tired. I had no second thoughts. He sat in a chair and we just talked. He said he was glad the tour was over, but that he had enjoyed it. He told me some anecdotes

tour. Frank had brief correspondence with George Routledge in Denmark. Routledge, now in his 80s, professed no memory at all of Lugosi, but always answered specific questions.

The writing was declared finished on July 1, 2000. As we prepared to go to press, we learned that a member of the backstage crew of the Dracula company was living in Toronto. During the Toronto premiere of the Dracula ballet in 1999, she had briefly talked with Elizabeth Miller of the Dracula Society. Elizabeth did not have her address, and was not even sure of the name, but we knew this woman must be the tour's original assistant stage manager (ie, ASM), Janet Reid, the only Canadian on the tour. Andi quickly located her through newspaper inquiries, and Frank, who by then was living in Houston, contacted her.

Janet hails from Winnipeg, and after World War II came to London with her English mother to audition for the Royal Academy in London. She was looking for a career in acting, but also wanted to escape Canada's harsh winters, which wrecked havoc on her health. She was admitted to the Academy in 1947, and studied there for 2 years. Janet stood about 4'11", was blonde and very jolly, but a weak voice undermined her hopes to play in musical theatre. Work was scarce when she graduated, but she eventually found a job in weekly repertory in Husham.

Frank interviewed Janet by telephone in July 2000:

Frank Dello Stritto: What were you doing just before joining the Dracula company?

Janet Reid: In early 1951 I was 21, and applied for a stage management job at a small club theatre in central London, the New Boltons. I met the Director, Peter Cotes, and was hired as a salary of about £6 a week, which was pretty hard to live on in London. I worked as ASM.

FDs: Club theatre?

JR: Yes, like a nightclub, but with a play for entertainment. What Americans call "dinner theatre." It was in Chelsea where my mother lived. About 2 months later a friend heard of the Bela Lugosi show—and that they were paying £10 a week, for an ASM—an enormous amount! I would be understudying the part of the maid. I gave in my notice, and joined the Dracula company; and that's how I met Bela.

FDs: Well, what was Bela like?

JR: He was a lot of fun, a sweetheart, a gentleman and a gentle man. He was the star, but a really sweet guy, a pleasure to be with, friendly to the cast and crew—no "big star" airs. Lillian told me, "Don't be afraid of Bela, he's just a big pussy cat," and I agree.

FDs: What did you think of Lillian?

JR: Lillian was obviously devoted to him. During the performances, she sat in a dim corner backstage, where she could see him. On his exit, she would hand him the lit cigar.

she had keep going for him—I think she puffed on it from time to time to keep it going! I often wondered if she liked the cigar, but I never had the nerve to ask her. We had a hard time with Bela and his cigars—smoking backstage was strictly forbidden but he still ignored the "No Smoking" signs. In desperation we printed some in Hungarian.

FDs: Did that work?

JR: No, he pretended he couldn't understand the language. "I can't read them," he said.

FDs: Did you talk much to Bela backstage?

JR: Sometimes. Bela told me that he wanted one final tour as Dracula. He said he was glad to have the chance to do it once more. Bela really believed in his character. It seemed to give him much pleasure. He believed in it so strongly, and took pains to see that everything went the way it should. Bela was very concerned with his trunk and cape. The cape was satin lined, but of a heavy material. He looked after it very carefully. He might have been concerned that it would go astray. Every night he would lock it in his trunk. One night he left the key to his trunk in his hotel. We called the hotel clerk. He got it, and sent it by taxi to the theatre. We got Bela's cape on him just in time for the curtain.

FDs: Any stories or anecdotes of Bela?

JR: Well, he pinched my bottom once?

FDs: Did he?

JR: Once he was onstage alone between performances, in full costume. He just stood there, lost in thought. Finally, he saw me looking at him. He opened his cape, and said "come here, under my cloak." I did. He wrapped it around me and then pushed my bottom.

FDs: What did you do?

JR: Oh, I let out a mock scream, laughed and ran away.

FDs: Did you see any evidence that Bela was having back and leg pains?

JR: Not really, but backstage, Bela didn't walk much, didn't move much. When he was in the wings, he just stood there.

FDs: As ASM, did you work with the bat?

JR: Oh yes, it had to be rigged up with wires to fly back and forth across the stage. We rehearsed them endlessly as it was very temperamental and from time to time crashed unexpectedly, but all in all it was very effective.

FDs: I sent you a list of the company members. Do you recall anything about them? Did you make friends with any of them?

JR: Yes, I know I was friendly with them, but I really don't remember the names. The company did not pal around a lot. I do remember Joan Winmill. I remember when she passed out in Middlesbrough.

FDs: Really, she told me that story, but I had my doubts about it.

JR: Oh, no—it's true. I literally stripped off her costume backstage. There was no privacy

And I finished the performance for her. In my career I was an understudy four times, and each time I got to go on when the actress could not perform. That one performance was my swan song with Dracula. I dropped out right after that. The company went on to Belfast, and I went back to London.

FDs: Why did you leave?

JR: I was subject to throat infections—strep throat and things like that—and had to have my tonsils out. I had booked ahead for the operation, and had to return to London. When I left, Bela arranged a modest party. He had some food and drinks brought in.

After Dracula and her tonsillectomy, Janet worked in London stage productions, while doing some television. She had a recurring role in an early television version of *Anne of Green Gables*. In 1957, she acted in both the West End and television productions of *The Glass Cage*. A few years later she returned to her native Canada, coincidentally just as the Canadian Broadcast Corporation was undergoing an expansion. She enjoyed a fine career on the CBC, and was married for some years to the famous author Timothy Findley.

Our book, with Janet's reminiscences included in the text, went to press in August 2000, but the search for eye witness accounts of the 1951 tour continues. Recently, Andi made contact with the family of David Dawson, the tour's Dr. Seward. Dawson returned to his native Australia in the 1950s, and died in the 1980s. His widow and two sons survive, and they all knew Bela in 1951. Andi is painstakingly recording their memories. The family of Ralph Wilson, the tour's second Van Helsing, heard of the book and contacted Frank. Wilson passed away in 1982. His wife Joyce traveled with her husband on the tour and remembers it and the Lugosi well. Frank, in Houston, Texas, is interviewing her in Cornwall, England, by e-mail. These may be the subject of a future *Cult Movies* piece.

The result of our researches is a new book, *Vampire Over London*—Bela Lugosi in Britain, published by *Cult Movies Press*. Only 1,000 copies of this hardbound, hardcover 400 page book exist. The dust jacket and book cover have striking designs by artist and Lugosi-fan Haig Demarjian. Each copy is individually numbered, and autographed by at least one of the authors (in red ink, just as Bela signed all his autographs in 1951).

To obtain a copy, send a check for \$29.95 plus \$3.00 S&H (in the USA) to:

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CULT MOVIES

Dr. Ackman's Diary

by Forrest J Ackerman

I got up this morning at four thirty in Baltimore, Maryland and now I am back after a 5 hour flight to my home in Horrorwood Kalifornia facing 75 pieces of mail, faxes, and I dare not check my phone messages, because I want to record the events of the 4th of July weekend fantasy film festival while they are still fresh in my mind.

As a Guest of Honor at the 15th annual Fanex, I flew in with my dear friend director Curtis Harrington, who featured me in the 1949 space vampire film with Florence Marley (Velans from the planet Centuron) and Basil Rathbone as the space station Scientist, Planet of Blood. My anonymous traveling companion on the plane was a young lady I should judge to be about 21 who (horrors!) had never heard of Boris Karloff! What do they teach children in school now days, about unimportant horrors like Hitler and Mussolini?

Once established in the con Hotel I found myself surrounded by glamour queens from Hammer Films: Veronica Carlson, statuesque beauty of *Dracula Has Risen From The Grave* and *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed*, Barbara Shelley (*Dracula, Prince of Darkness*), and all the way from France, Yvonne Monlaur of the memorable David Peel *Dracula* film. I confess I became very fond of Veronica during the festival and was rewarded with a kiss when parting. She is a remarkable woman.

Also participating in the Fanex were directors Fred Olen Ray, who cameoed me in *Attack of the 60-Foot Centerfold*, the director of *Frankenstein and Me*, who filmed me as the priest at the burial of Burt Reynolds, Terry Pace for whom I cameoed in *Seduction in the Streets*, Jeff Roberts, for whom I am editing *It's Alive!*; Buddy Barnett, whose *Vampire Hunters Club* was premiered featuring John Agar, Carla Laemmle, Debbie Dutch, Bob Burns, Beinke Stevens, and a cast of tens in this playful-for-laughs horror film spoof. Oh, yes, and I appear as myself wearing a recreation of my 1939 "futuristic costume" as seen in *Amazon Women on the Moon*.

We were treated to screenings of such films as the silent *Fant and French Fall of the House of Usher*, *Son of Ingagi*, *She* (Helen Gahagan 1938), *Neboging* and other Midnight Marquee imagination movies.

During the Con I had a delightful reunion with Gary Dort, one of the 1300 Famous Monsters fans I befriended during my 1965 trip of 8700 miles through the United States; Harvey Clarke, all the way over from England where today he is an intimate friend of Christopher Lee

and says Lee will be seen in *Lord of the Rings* and the next episode of *Star Wars*; Linda Conrad, fabulous fanne mother of five; Rick Wannen, who gave me a wonderful gift of a videocassette dubbed into English of the amazing Russian scientist, *In The Stars By Hard Ways*; young George Stover, creator of the infamous "Bloody Hilar Hunks"; the owner of The Blob, whose name goes out of my head at this time during a Senior Moment. During my hour-long lecture there were a million names and book and movie titles on the tip of my tongue but I was frustrated twice: once that I couldn't remember Edgar Rice Burroughs' pseudonym Normal Bean and then when asked for favorite fantasy films I could come up with *The Man Who Could Work Miracles* and *Dead of Night* and *The Green Mile* and *I Accuse* (also a Bradbury favorite, with the actual Broken Paces of World War I) but I couldn't for the life of me remember *Peter Pan* with adorable Betty Bronson. In both cases Jeff Roberts came to my rescue - guess I'll have to include him in my repertoire. (Gettin' Old?)

Just while I think of it, I'll record that the first person to purchase a ticket for the banquet celebrating my November 85th birthday is fan/author/friend Arthur Jean Cox. Who will be the first strictly pro? The first female? (Flash! Anne Hardin of Spring Island, South Carolina). The first individual from outside the USA? The person from the longest distance away? Watch this feature for further developments.

Now I must tell you about the two extraordinary things that happened at Fanex XV. I was called to the stage to sit in a chair and then John E. Parnum came to the mike and said: "Forry, you're going to hear lots of appreciation from editors and writers about how you and Famous Monsters inspired their creativity to write for and publish their own fanzines. All that is true but Cinemascope publisher George Stover and Associate Editor Steve Vertlieb and I would like to thank you for instilling in us the curse of the collecting mania. Nothing normal like stamps, coins and sports cards but posters, pressbooks, stills, etc., so that we could have our own diminutive Ackermansions. Steve has squandered his life savings on thousands of LPs and CDs, sometimes buying 3 copies of each. George has spent a lifetime searching out obscure horror and sci-fi magazines, resulting in the second largest collection on the east coast (I have the largest). And where has that led us? We're all flat broke. (Loud laughter from the audience.) So thanks for placing that curse on us and putting the Macabre in Cinemascope."

Then one by one editors of *Scarlet Street*, *Cult Movies*, *Midnight Marquee*, *Psychotronic* (a very rare appearance, I was told, of Michael Weldon), *Fangoria*, *Monsters from the Vault*, *Chiller*, *SPFX*,

Little Shoppe of Horrors and more stepped up to the mike and addressed me in glowing, fulsome tributes. I truly felt like I'd died and gone to Heaven.

Then on the highlight occasion when Harrington, Carlson, Fred Olen Ray, Monlaur, Shelley and others were given plaques, John E. Parnum said: "The last two years I have awarded posthumous Laemmles to Jack Pierce and Robert Bloch. In *The Sixth Sense* Haley Joel Osment saw dead people, I just give them awards."

"This year, however, I've got a live one. And what a live one he is! At 84 years young, this man has achieved more in his lifetime than most of us ever dream about. I'm speaking of Forrest J Ackerman. Editor, publisher, author, archivist, creative consultant, critic, columnist, radio and television personality, actor in over 90 cameos, world traveler, Esperantist, literary agent, recipient of the first Hugo and many other awards, inspiring influence on Stephen King, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas et al."

"But most important tonight, he is the reason we are gathered here this weekend. Without Forry there would be no Fanex because there would have been no *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, the magazine that entertained and influenced us all and first got the ball rolling."

"When Forry was a lad he would send ideas and critiques to Carl Laemmle, head of Universal Studios, who responded with a carte blanche letter that read 'Give this kid anything he wants.' This formed the cornerstone of Forry's incredible collection which he has shared with us in *Famous Monsters* and which is housed in the Ackermansion where he graciously hosts hundreds of visitors each year."

"Therefore, it is only fitting that Carl Laemmle be a part of that museum and that Forrest J Ackerman be a recipient tonight. Uncle boys, come up and meet Uncle Carl."

I was thrilled to receive a standing ovation from the packed auditorium with the largest attendance of the entire convention. A La Karloff in *Bride of Frankenstein*, I intoned "We belong dead." Then, recalling how Carl Laemmle after 62 letters back and forth between us had said, "Give this kid anything he wants," clutching my Laemmle statuette to my chest I said, "I don't know how you accomplished this, whether you contacted him by our board or what, but after 70 years I've got what I wanted. Thank you!"

Now it's 7 o'clock p.m. and I'm going to dinner.

Sincerely,
FJA

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REEL TIMES

By Coco Kiyonaga

- Working with Michael Coper and the magazine has been a real adventure, as well as an education about the world of film. When I first met Michael I had no idea about the intricacies of making of films.
- I was used to going to the movie theater, buying my ticket and popcorn and watching the screen. Now I am fascinated by the director, the camera man, set designer, make up artist, as well as the actors on the film. I have come to realize that the real stars in movies are the people behind the scene.
- A few of those people in "the business" may not be in large letters on the marquee but they are the movers and shakers in the industry.
- One of those names is Ron Foad. He has been passionately making indie movies at least since the 60's. This summer he is directing his first 35mm so-8 teen comedy called MAY DAY for Lynn-Wenger productions. I first met Ron about 6 years ago and have been enjoying his movies ever since. He has made some real heart grippers and from the looks of things he will continue to do so!
- Dennis Bartok the film programmer from the American Cinematheque is also an accomplished screenwriter. Word has it that he's sold his script last year...more news on that in the future.
- At the recent Fangoria Convention, Colleen Gray, from such classics as Kansas City Confidential, Death of a Scoundrel, Nightmare Alley, as well as the cult film The Werch Women was signing autographs in the midst of all the horror. Look for the Cult Movies Magazine interview in the near future.
- Also coming soon, the "Kate and Kernal World of Lisa Petrucci" Lisa is a very talented artist 'fascinated' with pupa girls from the 1950's and 60's.

SHOCKING VIDEOS OF THE BIZARRE!

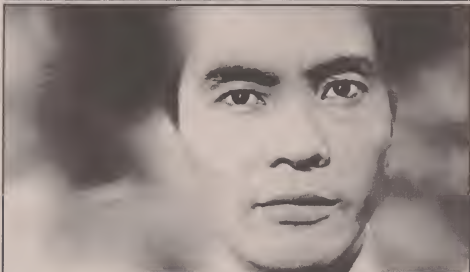
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THE EARTH AND THE STARS: NOTES ON THE HUMAN VAPOR

by GUY MARINER TUCKER



The unexpected boxoffice triumph of *Gojira* in 1954—and even more so, the film's worldwide success in its subsequent incarnation as *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* in 1956—surprised the Japanese film industry as nothing else had since Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* captured the top prize at the Venice Film Festival in 1950. Just as Western observers were startled at the resurgence of the Japanese film industry, so also were Japanese filmmakers amazed that Westerners had any interest in their product at all.

"When *Godzilla* became a hit in America," its director Ishiro Honda recalled, "that's when I knew we'd really made something special."

Rival studios responded by churning out modern fantasy product of their own, most of

it more directly imitative of American science fiction than *Godzilla* had been. Daei came out with *Warning from Space*, Toei released its *Super Giant* serials, and Shintoho produced *Fearful Invasion of the Flying Saucers*, while a loosely crafted TV show about a giant monster, *Agon*, appeared on television. The latter two projects were both written by Shinichi Sekizawa (he also directed the *Saucers* movie) who, following *Agon*, wrote his first of many giant monster films for Toho, *Baran* (aka *Voron the Unbelievable*).

Most Japanese fantasy films up until that time had been period films about ghosts, or the occasional anomaly such as *Kong Kong Appears in Edo* (a knockoff of the original classic which was made in 1934, and which

today appears lost) and *Rainbow Man* (1949), a dreary Daei production notable mainly for its occasional color effects, a typically vibrant Akira Ifukube score, and its status as evidently the first Japanese fantasy film to deal with the subject of human mutation. (An especially strange extrapolation, as the stagy, stodgy movie seems modeled more after *The Bel Witsyrs* than anything else.)

Godzilla had premiered on November 3, 1954. Its unprecedented success compelled its producing company Toho Studios to churn out another special effects fantasy as soon as possible, to capitalize on the all-important upcoming New Year's season (then, and now, the biggest moviegoing season in Japan). As there was hardly any time to put together

another monster film on that schedule, Toho and special effects wizard Eiji Tsuburaya, working with director Motoyoshi Oda, churned out *Invisible Man*, released on December 29, 1954. This curious but not unpleasant film was a modest success, and served as the template for nearly all of the subsequent entries in what shortly came to be called "Toho's Mutant Series." The next, *Abominable Snowman* (aka *Half Human*) followed in the summer of 1955. Underwhelmed by its performance compared to that of *Godzilla* and its April 1955 sequel *Godzilla's Counterattack*, Toho decided for a while to confine special effects techniques to more proven genres: giant monsters (*Rodan*, 1956) and period fantasies (*The Bewitching Love of Madame Pai*, aka *Madame White Snake*, 1956). A sequel to *Rodan* was conceived immediately afterwards, and might well have been produced, but for three factors: First, the Japanese boxoffice for the New Year's 1956-7 season (which included *Rodan* and Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*) fell by a dramatic percentage. Second, by 1957, Toho had managed to sell all of its special effects films (except *Invisible Man*) for American distribution, and were becoming aware that it might be wise to develop movies expressly with the American market in mind. Third, the first movie so designed, *Earth Defense Force* (aka *The Mysterians*, December 1957), was such a resounding boxoffice flop in Japan (although fans later generally regarded it as a classic), the studio became petrified. What was this strange genre, anyway? Why did one work and not another? And how could they continue to produce special effects extravaganzas (which were already, thanks to Eiji Tsuburaya and his staff, Toho's hallmark) at a reasonable budget? *Invisible Man* had been produced at a



HUMAN VAPOR, BRENCO, 1962. Produced by Toho Studios

pituitance, and more than made its money back. Eager to test the waters of the domestic market as well as the foreign, and knowing of the science fiction boom then afoot in America, Toho authorized *Beauty and the Liquid People* (aka *The H-Man*) in 1958, wondering if the public would respond to this different kind of menace. The public did, though not to the same extent that it liked the giant monster movies.

Still, the miniature expenses were considerably less on *H-Man* than on *Godzilla* or *Rodan*, so the investment made sense. Additionally, *The H-Man*'s genre, like *Invisible Man*'s, was crime drama more than fantasy, and required far less in the way of outlandish and futuristic sets or props. And the picture's immediate sale to Hollywood's Columbia Pictures suggested that there could be more to the market than monsters. While Toho labored on producing three special-effects extravaganzas for 1959—Kajiro Yamamoto's fairy-tale fantasy *Magic Monkey of the Sky*, Ishiro Honda's *Battle in Outer Space* and the studio's 1000th official production (numerous smaller pictures were started, completed and released before it came out), Hiroshi Inagaki's epic *The Birth of Japan* (aka *The Three Treasures*), two other, more modestly conceived Mutant Movies went into development: *The Telegraphed Man* and *Human Vapor* #1 (aka *The Human Vapor*). *The Human Vapor* actually was written first, and the cover of its script indicates that Toho had already decided to call

the films Mutant Movies: *Vapor* was then called the third in the series, following *Invisible Man* and *H-Man*. (Presumably *Abominable Snowman* was then considered more of a monster movie than a mutant movie, which technically is more accurate, although the *Snowman* was hardly *Godzilla*-sized.) As he (very briefly) had with *Invisible Man*, director Ishiro Honda worked on the development of both scripts, and his influence is subtly in evidence throughout *The Telegraphed Man*, but that film was ultimately assigned to one of Toho's most promising up-and-coming directors, Jun Fukuda. Released abroad as *The Secret of the Telegram*, this was Fukuda's second film as main director, following a professionally disastrous debut, *Playing With Fire* (1959).

The quality of the film wasn't in question; if anything, Fukuda had done too good and vivid a job portraying the reckless youth the film was about, resulting in a picture so risible that Toho was actually embarrassed for the company image, and hence only released it in rural parts of Japan. Producer Tomoyuki Tanaka, who was singlehandedly developing the majority of special effects projects at Toho, took pity on Fukuda (whose sole prior special effects experience had been as chief assistant director on *Rodan*), and got him assigned to *Telegraphed Man*. This is probably why Honda, for the first time since 1951, found himself at the helm of only a single picture for the whole of one year: what became the December 1960



The Human Vapor

TWIN TERROR SHOW! It outshocks them all!

ALL H- BREAKS LOOSE!

IT'S THE
MOST
HORRIFYING
MONSTER
YOU
NEVER
SAW!

Only the most
beautiful
are the
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release of *The Human Vapor*. Although *Telegraphed Man*, an April release, had not performed superbly, Toho still thought the Mutant Series might yet have some juice to it, especially since *The H-Man* had been accepted by the prestigious Columbia (as, shortly, *Battle in Outer Space* and *Mofina* would be as well). The *Telegraphed Man* had followed the crime-movie template of *Invisible Man* and *H-Man*; on the surface, so would *The Human Vapor*. However, exploring the vagaries of the underworld was never particularly the strong suit of the team of director Ishiro Honda and writer Takeshi Kimura; Jun Fukuda obviously revelled in the vulgarity and violence of the world of crime (most of his best movies belong to that genre, directly or not), but Honda's was a calmer, more meditative milieu. In Takeshi Kimura, he found a nearly ideal counterpart.

Takeshi Kimura is among the most unsung of all the studio scribes who labored in the great era of Japanese film known as the

"Showa Thirties" (1935-1945, the decade comprising those particular years of the reign of the Emperor Hirohito Showa), and his background and personality among the most eccentric and intriguing—and also, thanks to his reclusive nature, among the most difficult to research. He appears never to have been interviewed, and was noticeably shy of having his picture taken—a photograph of Kimura has yet to be turned up, even by the most voracious of Japanese historians. He must have learned to be wary very early, not least because of his politics. Born on February 4, 1912, Kimura became an outspoken member of Japan's then-illegal Communist Party, notorious for scattering pro-Communist leaflets throughout his home prefecture of Shiga. One of his main disciples was a young university friend named Tomoyuki Tanaka, who, while by all accounts not a Communist himself, was enthralled by Kimura's passion and charisma. If he was not physically

handsome—Fumao Tanaka observed "He had an intimidating face"—Takeshi Kimura still was a master orator, and knew exactly how to spellbind an individual, or a whole room. In the months before *The Human Vapor*'s production, Kimura's colleague Shinichi Sekizawa watched Kimura regale a roomful of Toho's assistant directors, who were threatening to strike. Kimura railed against what he felt was the assistant directors' hypocrisy—they wanted only to work on "quality" films rather than the bread-and-butter movies that comprised Toho's real livelihood—and his speech was considered so powerful, the strike was averted. Tomoyuki Tanaka had been two years' Kimura's junior when they met in college, and when, following World War II, Kimura was pondering a move to Tokyo, the still respectful Tanaka offered him work writing scripts for Toho. Kimura had already been drummed out of Japan's Communist Party, since he preferred the Internationalist Communist line to the Marxist variety the Japanese Communists then preferred. Although in his university years it was assumed he would have a lengthy career in politics, Kimura, who had a wife and a daughter, gave up such illusions after leaving the Communist Party, although his opinions and attitudes would continue to be thoroughly expressed in most or all of the scripts he wrote. Kimura's first scripts for director Honda were *Redon*, *The Mysterians* and *The H-Man*. He also collaborated numerous times with the mutual friend of Honda's and Akira Kurosawa's, director Senkichi Taniguchi, including the notorious *Red-Light Bases* (1952), which the American censors (then still overseeing Japan's film productions) considered to be an anti-American tract, although Taniguchi insisted that he and Kimura had had nothing like that in mind at all. (The movie was released to theaters, but otherwise remains suppressed from video release and theatrical retrospectives.) Kimura also became a favorite of one of Toho's most prestigious directors, Hiroshi Inagaki. Even the least of Kimura's work nonetheless is shot through with the same preoccupations: a broad feeling of anti-authoritarianism, a corresponding cynicism about politicians, the military and the police ("Kimura always had an agenda where the police were concerned," Ishiro Honda chuckled), and, more deeply yet, a profound yearning for romantic love, and a simultaneous conviction that such love is unattainable. *The Human Vapor*, along with the later *Mafango* (also the last of Toho's Mutant Films), portrays this as vividly as anything else in Kimura's resume. "He had a fearful way of looking at the world," Fumio Tanaka remembered, and all the films he wrote with and for Ishiro Honda betray this to a greater or lesser degree. Kimura was drafted into fantasy film scriptwriting right before Shinichi Sekizawa; between the two of them, they

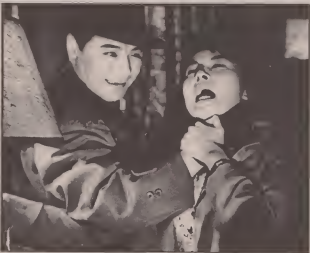


***The H Man*; Columbia Pictures 1959. Produced by Toho Studios**

wrote the bulk of the classic Toho special effects films of the 1950s and 1960s. However, it was obvious early what their respective talents were: Sekizawa tended to write jolly and extroverted scripts, as matched his personality, and Kimura's work was far more introverted and introspective. Senkichi Taniguchi's *The Great Bandit*, aka *The Lost World of Sinbad*, one of the few scripts which both worked on, is a good example of their contrasting styles. Sekizawa remembered Kimura asking "Do you really like working on these fantasy movies?" Sekizawa replied, "Sure I do! They're lots of fun!" Kimura grimly replied, "Not for me." With Ishiro Honda's guidance, Kimura nonetheless managed to produce many fascinating scripts, *The Human Vapor* being among the very best. At first on the surface a simple crime drama, about the hunt by a detective (Tatsuya Mihashi) for an elusive bank robber who may be the female dancer Fujichiyō Kasuga (Kaoru Yachigusa), halfway through the film proves to be something else altogether—a doomed love story of a kind much favored by the Japanese, dealing with the romance between the dancer and the one person who loves her above all others, Mizuno (Yoshio Tsuchiya), who poses as a librarian, but who in fact has become a mutant, a man who may become as one with the very air around him. This power has not only made Mizuno able to steal money to restore the formerly ailing Fujichiyō to her former wealth, but also has rendered him insane—a fact which Fujichiyō does not realize

until she sees him killing policemen on her behalf, after Detective Okamoto has imprisoned her for spending the cash Mizuno has been passing to her. Mizuno and Fujichiyō fall in love, prior to the film's action, when

both shut up in a "sanitarium"—the script is not explicit, but it seems likely that both of them were tubercular when they met. He is an ordinary man then, a former test pilot felled by illness, and she an aristocrat felled by



***The H Man*; Gripping action scene**



The H-Man/ Nightclub scene 1959

circumstance. They fall in love, and he determines he will do anything for her. Tempted by the scar-faced scientist Dr. Sano (Fuyuki Murakami), Mizuno agrees to undergo the elder man's bizarre experiment, which makes of him (per the "doctor's" notes) the "First Human Vapor." An enraged Mizuno kills Sano, but soon realizes that with his new powers, he can help not only himself, but more importantly, his beloved Fujichio. Believing he is independently wealthy, Fujichio agrees to use the money he gives her to revitalize her own dancing career, although she soon realizes what a monster her love has become. "I must dance now, or never," Fujichio explains, even in the face of friends who believe she is jeopardizing her health to dance again so soon. Mizuno, long since unmasked as the Human Vapor, pays for her to dance in a massive Tokyo theater, even though he and she will be nearly the only witnesses. Fujichio also knows that the Japanese authorities intend to kill Mizuno there, but serenely performs her final dance "Daughter of Fuji," all the while knowing Mizuno has sabotaged the trap the police set. But she is also most aware of what a madman her lover has become, and at the last, wrapped in his embrace, produces a cigarette lighter that inflames the gas that the police have been pumping in—killing them both, but she could neither bear to let Mizuno go on killing humans in order to finance her career

and his own sense of revenge, nor could she stand the idea of a life without the one person who showed her the most kindness. (In perhaps the nicest touch in Kaoru Yachigusa's portrayal of Fujichio, after she produces the lighter, which Mizuno doesn't see, she embraces him even closer—she doesn't want this to happen, but she sees no other way for both of them to be free of this world, and together in the next.) The vast majority of the characters' decisions and thinking occur off-camera. Kimura and Honda knew that less could often be more, and signaled their intentions through images more than words or actions. Okamoto's shrewish girlfriend, the career girl Kyoko (Keiko Sata), grows a conscience at the last minute and goes to Fujichio to implore her not to appear on the stage, as Mizuno demands. Fujichio, who has met Kyoko before, observes that the reporter is really there to protect her own man, Okamoto: if Mizuno appears at the theater when Fujichio does, all manner of chaos might (and finally does) ensue, perhaps endangering Okamoto. Honda underlines this particular sequence as much with what he leaves out as with what he includes. Fujichio remains nearly silent throughout the film, and we are almost utterly ignorant of her motives until the very end—if we knew too much, there would be no suspense. Until the rainswept reunion scene between Fujichio and Mizuno at her home

(which Mizuno has helped to rebuild), we do not even know whether she doesn't sanction, or even order the things he is doing, this lovesick man-mutant for whom she may feel nothing at all. Instead, we learn she is the dupe of a maniac; and it does seem to hurt her, in their final scene together, that it is only she, the one he most loves, that has the power to undo him. As well, it is she who finds the strength to do that very thing: she pulls the cigarette lighter from her robes, and yet then ignores it, holding him tighter in their last embrace. Honda punctuates the moment with a poignant close-up of her teary face. The last dance she dances is as much for herself as for him: a memory of her past triumphs, a means of restoring her dignity before she chooses to die with the man she cannot bear living without. The stunning final shot of the film, with a cascade of flowers tumbling over the body of Mizuno, becomes the symbol of something Mizuno said to Okamoto a few minutes earlier: "This [the dance] is our wedding," Mizuno declares, and so it is never Fujichio's fundamental betrayal of Mizuno that the viewer observes, it is only the depth of her memory of their love. Kimura and Honda mirror the relationship of Kyoko and Okamoto in that of Fujichio and Mizuno. All of them turn out to be very different people by the end than we assumed they were at the beginning. Fujichio, for instance, is



The Human Vapor

unaware until the very end that Mizuno is mad, and when they meet at her home, Honda spotlights a burning candle. In the following scene, the candle is shown again, but unlit. As well, Fujichio is shown arranging flowers, which foreshadows Mizuno's crazed "wedding," and the concluding shot of the falling bouquet. Fujichio makes clear to Kyoko that she knows what is going to happen, and is resigned to it. That the candle is no longer burning is a sign that her passion for Mizuno has fallen, in the face of the fact of his insanity; but the memory of her love for him, or even pity for him, has not. Hence, she serenely arranges her flowers, as though preparing for the "wedding." At first appearing a simple policier, *The Human Vapor* turns out to be a tragedy, and among the favorite works of both Kimura and Honda. It occupied a special place in the heart as well of the man who played Mizuno, actor Yoshio Tsuchiya, who had been discovered by Akira Kurosawa (the director was amazed by Tsuchiya's energy and ferocity when auditioning unknown actors for *Seren Sinuara*, where Tsuchiya wound up playing a pivotal role). Tsuchiya, a die-hard science fiction fan, had actually lobbied for the title role of *Invisible Man* in 1934 (he wound up playing the reporter instead), and more successfully demanded the role of the alien commander in *The Mysterians* Impressed by Tsuchiya's forceful commitment even to a role wherein his face would never be seen, Honda soon grew as fond of the young actor as his friend Kurosawa had (Kurosawa first introduced

Tsuchiya to Honda; as Tsuchiya recalled it, Kurosawa was wary of Tsuchiya's wasting his talent in films made by "second-rate directors," but encouraged the actor to appear in anything Ishiro Honda made, assuring him "if Honda directs it, it's sure to be a good film.") Like many of the best actors under contract to Toho at the time, Yoshio Tsuchiya became as regular and reliable a fixture in Honda's films as Kurosawa's. Interestingly, Tsuchiya prefers the American version of *The Human Vapor* to the original Japanese version. Possibly this is partly because in the American rethinking of the film (produced by Brenco, the script was by John Meredyth Lucas of the original *Star Trek* fame), Mizuno's character dominates the film, narrating it stem to stern, and even surviving at the end, although at a miserable cost (the loss of his dancer love). As well, Tsuchiya said, "They found the perfect guy to do my voice!"—the excellent Chinese-American character actor James Hong, who had also done most of the dubbing voices for *Godzilla*, *King of the Monsters!* The Americanized version has its moments, and is an intriguing rethinking of the same material, but finally boasts little of the depth of the original version. The score by Kunio Miyachū (*Godzilla's Revenge*, *Ultraman*) was thrown out, and replaced by highly inappropriate wall-to-wall library music. As well, the subtler Noh dance music used for the scenes of Fujichio's stage appearances was replaced by good but inappropriately uproarious Kabuki music, the one aspect of the American version that Tsuchiya found especially hilarious. The

Human Vapor did no better at the box office than *The Telegraphed Man* had, but has grown a reputation as a cult favorite both in Japan and the United States in the decades that followed. (I once saw a copy of the videotape adorned with a "Recommended by the Manager" wrapper at a rental store in Tokyo.) Sequels to both movies were planned; *The Telegraphed Man vs. the Flame Man* (written by Jan Fukuda) and *Frankenstein vs. the Human Vapor*—a few pages of the latter written by Shinichi Sekizawa, before the plug was pulled. The request for the sequel came from the American distributor, interestingly enough, but the money fell through. The idea was that Mizuno would have sought out Dr. Frankenstein in Germany to resurrect Fujichio. Evidently none of this plot made its way into Takeshi Kimura's subsequent scripts *Frankenstein Conquers the World* and *War of the Gargantuas*.

The nominal main star of *The Human Vapor*, Tatsuya Mihashi, never made another fantasy film, but continued his successful career in various crime and war films, including two American WW2 pictures, *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970) and Frank Sinatra's sole directorial effort, *None But the Brave* (1965). Kaoru Yachigusa, who was a genuinely classically trained dancer (she had toplined Toho's version of *Madame Butterfly* in 1935) married Senkichi Taniguchi, but continued to act in the occasional film and TV project. Keiko Sato, who had never acted before, seems to have only one other subsequent credit, a split-second cameo in Honda's *Gorath* (1962), promoted to actress by a Toho executive who was fond of her, she later married him and quit acting altogether, as many starlets of her generation did. Despite his high profile in the films of Akira Kurosawa, Yoshio Tsuchiya discovered over the years that he was most often recognized, outside of Japan, for his roles in fantasy films. A French taxi driver recalled his face from *Matango*, at a hotel in Colorado, tourists who had just seen *The Human Vapor* were astonished to observe Tsuchiya dining placidly in the restaurant adjacent (they promptly lined up for autographs). Without a doubt, *The Human Vapor* remains among the finest films Tsuchiya was ever associated with, and the role of Mizuno among the best performances he ever essayed. The film also remains among the most remarkable Ishiro Honda ever directed, and one that he called among his very favorites. As well, its portrayal of ideal yet doomed love is as personal as screenwriter Takeshi Kimura ever put to the page. It is largely an unacknowledged classic, but still it is a classic. —

Special thanks to: Ishiro Honda, Kimi Honda, Yoshio Tsuchiya, Fumio Tanaka, Shinichi Sekizawa, Jun Fukuda, James Hong, and Senkichi Taniguchi

THE LIFE & CAREER OF A KARLOFF



**CO-STAR:
FINTAN
MEYLER
(AS TOLD TO
TOM WEAVER)**



In one of *Thriller's* eeriest first-season episodes, "Well of Doom," a wealthy Englishman (Ronald Howard) en route to his bachelor party is abducted by a creepy pair of netherworld characters (Henry Daniell, Richard Kiel) with seemingly supernatural powers... but a very Earthly interest in their prisoner's moneys and estate. Cast as Howard's fiancée, another captive of the unholy duo, was actress Fintan Meyler.

A dark-haired, brown-eyed daughter of Ireland, Meyler (one of seven children) knew from girlhood that she wanted to be an actress, and yet as a kid she never revealed her secret ambition. But after completing her early years of schooling at a Dublin convent, she began studying at the Gate Theatre. Meyler next entered a beauty contest on a whim—and won. (Her mother had to hide the newspapers from her father.) A two-week vacation in New York was part of the teenager's prize, as Meyler picks up her own story from here.

When I arrived in America, I knew that I'd "come home," that I'd found my place in life. I loved the American people and I didn't want to leave the American people, because they were wonderful. I lost my heart to this country. I wouldn't go home, so my mother and father got on a plane—my mother had never flown before!—and came over to get me. They stayed a little while in New York, and then we got on a plane to go back to Ireland. I was so unhappy getting on that plane to leave America. I was on the plane with my parents but, just before they shut the door, I said, "Goodbye, Mommy. Goodbye, Daddy," and I jumped plane, with 35 cents in my pocket and my little overnight bag. Everything else, all my luggage, went back to Ireland. I did what my heart and soul told me to do. Stay in America.

I got 200 jobs, one after the other—I didn't know how to do anything. Then I came out to Los Angeles and I got a job downtown in a diamond firm, as a receptionist. I also went to school at night, in the Drama Department at Los Angeles City College. I'd go from work to school on a bus at night. I did summer stock, four plays in Santa Fe, New Mexico, then came home and got a job as an usherette at Cinerama Theater at night. That way I had my days free to go on interviews. I was totally miserable, nobody would give me anything.

I got my first job on *Matinee Theater*, a live television show. They gave me the script the day before and they said, "Read that part there"—but the guy pointed to the wrong part! I studied that part that night and went back the next day. I began reading the part, and the casting director said, "Wait, wait, wait, wait! That's not the part. Your part is on the very last page—the two lines there, where the little English maid says, 'Tea is served.'" I had read the juvenile lead! Well, the director Lamont Johnson said, "Let her alone, she's great!"—and gave me the job! They liked me so much in that, they later gave me a lead—not just a juvenile lead, but a lead in one with Nico Minardos, the Greek actor. I went on from there. Once I began getting some good roles, MCA [the talent agency] came after me and they put me under contract.

I didn't see Boris Karloff when I did my *Thriller* because he only hosted it. But I'd worked with him before, on a *Playhouse 90* called "Heart of Darkness" with Roddy McDowall and Eartha Kitt. They promised me the female lead in that, but then they gave it to Inga Swenson and gave me a small part instead. I cried and everything about that. Karloff was in "Heart of Darkness" too, and I loved him. He was the gentlest, sweetest man, with a little Indian-English accent. His skin was...not saffron, but it had a yellow tinge to it. He was part East Indian—did you know that? I was very tired on the set one day and he said, "I go to this little, quiet spa on Santa Monica Boulevard near La Cienega. It's a private spa, run by a family, and they're wonderful. You ought to go there if you're tired." He said he went there at night when he left the studio, he said, "It helps me"—he had the most dreadful arthritis in his legs. I think that's why he walked the way he did—his legs were almost bowed from it. My sister and I went, and it was a lovely Swedish spa. It had a steam room, and a massage table in

another room—it was that small. My sister and I went into the steam room and sat down, and the lady came in and poured some water on the coals and closed the door. Well, my sister and I almost fainted from the heat! We couldn't breathe, and we were young girls! We couldn't get out of there fast enough! But I did tell Boris the next day that we had been there—I said, "It was a little hot, but..." [laughs]. And he was delighted. He was lovely, so gentle to everyone, and very quiet. A very charming man.

At the time I did *Thriller*, my first baby was six weeks old. I didn't want to do that part because I had a very bad birth. Oh, horrible—I could barely move. But MCA pleaded with me to do it, because I think MCA handled Ronald Howard too—MCA liked to "package" the talent. They said, "It's not a big part, but they talk about you all the way through!" [Laughs] They said it wouldn't be tiring for me, so I did it.

The director, John Brahm, I remember only vaguely. Before we started shooting, I went in to see him and I was talking to him about the part—I didn't really want to do it, I just told you why. Well, I spilled something on his desk and I said, "Oh, I'm so embarrassed!" And he said, "That's the very thing, that's just what I want in this part! That characteristic!"

I also remember the boy, the big boy [Richard Kiel]. He was so big! And I was scared to death of him because he was so evil-looking! Actually, he was a nice boy, so sweet and kind on the set, and yet I couldn't help being a little frightened because he was just so big! I have a picture here somewhere of me in his arms, and I look like a doll.

Torin Thatcher was in that, too, and I liked him, he was darling to me. Ronald Howard was the son of Leslie Howard, the actor, and Ronald was kind of aloof. American actors are different, American actors are friendly and they're warm and we'd kid and laugh. Ronald Howard was very nice, he was charming, but he was aloof. I don't think he was comfortable in the part.

There's a scene where Ronald Howard is climbing up out of the water at the bottom of a well. He wore a wetsuit under his clothes when they shot that. The water was cold, and I guess he didn't want to be wet all through. I wasn't there when that scene was shot, I was only there for my scenes. But the night I saw the show on TV, I said, "Oh, my God, you can see the wetsuit!" The front of his shirt was open a bit and you could see the wetsuit shining

right through the wet shirt! That show was an old piece, set years in the past, and they didn't have wetsuits in those days. And even if they did have wetsuits then, Ronald Howard's character wouldn't have been wearing one that night, under his tuxedo! I got the biggest kick out of that. I don't know why they didn't cut that out.

I saw "Well of Doom" again recently, and I couldn't believe how thin I was! My baby was almost eight pounds, and this was six weeks after the baby was born. Look at my little waist, isn't that amazing? And did you notice in the last part that there was a diamond ring on my finger? That was real. I was married to an oil man. You know [dancer-director] Gower Champion? I married his young brother Bob. Bob had bought me this gorgeous diamond ring—it was almost a six-karat, brilliant cut, and beautiful color. And I would never take it off [laughs]. They begged me at Universal when I was doing that damn show, "Pleasee take the ring off," but I said, "No, I'm gonna wear it." They had a prop man follow me around the set because of the ring, it was that valuable. They were scared to death. Isn't that funny?

I stopped acting after my second baby was born. Once I had my babies, I just lost the interest. Even though we had a lot of wealth, and I had a nanny and everything, I wanted to be with my children myself. I wanted to rear them, not somebody else. I wanted to teach them and be with them. Also, once MCA closed down, it wasn't easy any more. They were so good to me, absolutely wonderful—I'll always remember them.

I was twice married and twice divorced, and I have two daughters and five grandchildren. The older daughter, Darcy, is a lawyer, and the younger daughter, Rory, is a writer who lives in Ireland. There's an old expression, "If you take a daughter or son from Ireland, it'll take one back." And, you know what? Rory went there on a holiday and fell in love with it, and that's where she lives.

I appreciate your sending the *Thriller* to me, but...I didn't really like it, to tell you the truth. I did it, but I was sorry afterwards, because I didn't like the script. It was too dark and dreary...very dreary. I don't like scary movies or TV shows. I love beautiful things. I really love beautiful things. I love the ocean. I love flowers. I go out every night and look to see where the Moon is and say hello to it. That's the truth! ■

Stuff to Read

Beyond Ballyhoo: Motion Picture Promotion and Gimmicks

by Mark Thomas McGee. 253pp. \$25 paperback

This book is about flamboyant promotion, the court artist side of the movie world. Everything the ballyhoo boys did to separate the customer from the price of a movie ticket, including Emergo, HypnoVision, 3-D, Cinemagic, DuoVision, Smell-O-Vision, and plenty more. Some of the gimmicks were one-time cons, such as the vibrating seats used by William Castle to simulate the monster in *The Tingler*. More sophisticated gimmicks were Hitchcocks' entire "No one will be allowed inside the theater after the film has begun," campaign for *Psycho*. (Less frequently mentioned is that Hitchcock also instructed theater managers and projectionists to keep the house lights off for 30 seconds after *Psycho* had concluded. Let the film sink in and make a dramatic impression and the audience will be more likely to tell their friends about the experience, felt Hitch.)

These and countless other promotional techniques are detailed by Mark McGee. He devotes a full chapter to recounting the art of radio spot advertising, and details notable events, names the names of some unsung heroes. Mr. Burt Wilson discovered during his five years with AIP that a hint (and it had to be a mere hint or the Federal Communications Commission would scream) of lesbianism helped sell tickets, even if there was no hint of it in the movie itself, which was certainly the case of *Black Mama, White Mama*, a 1972 female version of *The Defiant Ones* of 1958.

"[Jail noises] ANNOUNCER: Fate brought them together in the same prison, but their color kept them apart. They endured everything imaginable in a woman's prison and now they were free, a thousand miles from nowhere, locked together by chains, hate, and the erotic desires a woman gets after a thousand nights without a man. They were free...but not from each other."

Sell me a ticket please!

Being an old theater boy myself, I enjoyed McGee's research that went into some of the wide screen processes. Most people credit television with creating the need for wide screen as a combative measure, to contrast the huge screen with the little box in the living room at home. Mark tells us about Polyvision, the name of the 3-strip system used in *Napoléon*, a French silent film by Abel Gance, which achieved the wide screen dimensions and look that came to be known as Cinemascope.

He tells of a demonstration shown at the 1900 world's exposition in Paris of a circular screen system using seven film projectors. Gimmicks as well as experimentation with size and dimension were a part of the earliest development of the movies.

McGee tells about the giveaways of vampire fangs, monster blood, barf bags, Odorama cards, and much more. He tells how 3-D virtually invaded the horror genre for a spell, later spilling over into the adult cinema.

This is a highly entertaining and informative book, part of McFarland's reprint series of their most popular titles, now at low prices in handsome paperback form. To order this one you can call McFarland at 800-253-2187, or reach them on the web

www.mcfarlandpub.com

Check out their ad in this issue of *Cult Movies* for more info.

Reviewed by Gino Colbert

The Ways Of The Lonely Ones A Collection of Mystical Allegories

by Manly Palmer Hall 127pp. \$10.95
illustrated Philosophical Research Society

Here is a collection of eight stories from beyond the veil, by the man known as Hollywood's Plato, an internationally famed philosophical writer, Manly P. Hall. Most of Mr. Hall's writings had to do with the history of religion and philosophy. On rare occasions he ventured into poetry, mystery, and even science-fiction writing: Forrest J Ackerman tells me he has a sci-fi novel in his collection written by Manly Hall, a long out of print epic called *The Smoky God*. Most of Mr. Hall's philosophical writings have been kept available to the public, while curiosities like his sci-fi writing have long since faded into history.

Here is one volume of writing that is fortunately still in print. The stories have titles such as *The Maker of the Gods*, *The Last of the Shamans*, *The Face of Christ*, and *The Master of the Blue Cape*. These are stories where there is no clear demarcation between the commonplace and the supernatural, where strange happenings and powers appear to be taken for granted. "In each age through which the earth passes there are a few who win immortality: there are one or two in each great civilization who rise to the fuller requirements of life and learn so well the lessons which confront them that they are capable of becoming a power for the unfoldment of men. There are some who discover, with their own self-realized qualities, their true reason for being," so begins one tale. Obviously these are stories

with a moral code and a message.

The late great mystic was a man who cultivated many celebrity friends and associates. Many of our readers know him as the friend, confidante, and advisor to Bela Lugosi. For years there was an ornate carved Oriental chair in Mr. Hall's office that was a gift from Rudolph Valentino. Lew Ayers, a student of Mr. Hall's, often gave lectures at the Philosophical Research Society.

Manly Hall, a man who lived to bring peace and understanding to a troubled world, died under mysterious circumstances in 1950, very close to what would have been his 90th birthday. Many in Mr. Hall's circle of friends felt he was murdered. Today, ten years later, the case is still under investigation by the Los Angeles Police Department. But the Society founded by this man of vision and knowledge still continues, and many of his most inspiring works are still available. If for no other reason, read this book to gain an insight into the mind of the man who was a friend to Lugosi for 25 years. It may lead to a greater conscious awakening into the nature of man's spirit and the meaning of life in this world. Contact the society to order this book.

Philosophical Research Society
3910 Los Feliz Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90027
Phone 323-633-2167/800-548-4062
Website www.prs.org

They also have a free catalog listing books of Mr. Hall still in print.

Reviewed by Michael Copner

Celebrities In Los Angeles Cemeteries: A Directory

by Allan R. Ellenberger 256pp. \$35 softcover
Appendices, bibliography, index.
McFarland, Box 611, Jefferson, North Carolina 28640

I can't get over how much this book looks like a phone book. It even says "A Directory" on the front cover. But there's no use calling these celebrities because they aren't going to answer any more, not on any ordinary phone known to man. This is as fascinating a tour guide as any listing of Hollywood Homes, but this is THE home; the final home. Anyone in the world is free to drop by anytime during business hours; you won't disturb a soul.

In accord with the fascination that surrounds Hollywood celebs and the increasing popularity of celebrity grave-hunting, this book serves as a guide to the final resting places of the many personalities who are buried in Los Angeles County, CA. It is arranged by cemetery, and provides the following information for each person: age at time of death; date and place of birth; date and place of death; cause of death; obituary headline of the deceased; inscription on grave marker; location of grave, and a film that the celeb appeared in. Some 70 cemetery names and street numbers are listed in the back pages.

Allan R. Ellenberger has visited 99 percent of the graves he lists in this book. He is also the author of *Ramon Novarro* (1999) and *Margaret O'Brien* (2000). He has written for such publications as *Classic Images* and *Films of the Golden Age*. He lives in Sherman Oaks, California.

A final appendix in his book lists those who escaped listing in the main text, by way of cremation, sea burial, or donation to science. Both Korla Pandit and the real Ed Wood were cremated. Many people know that Lon Chaney Jr. was donated to science when he died, and information on that is listed here. It's not JUST for the ghoul in all of us, there's plenty of factual information to gain from letting your fingers walk through THESE hallowed pages.

Reviewed by Coco Kiyonaga

Sara Karloff Presents Frankenstein: The Legacy

\$6.99, Pocket Books Fantasy

It was 1931 when theatergoers of all ages were scared out of their wits by a movie called *Frankenstein*. Exactly seventy years later this coming October, the public will see the dawn of a new Frankenstein era. Flowing from the pen of author Christopher Schildt, a new monster will arise from the pages to frighten another generation of horror fans.

Besides the anniversary, how does this new novel compare to the 1931 classic movie? They are so intertwined in a series of coincidences that it appears that fate was at work to create this new age of monsters.

Anticipating the successful launch of its *Dracula* movie in 1931, Universal Studios took a chance on backing the production of a movie based on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Once approved, casting for the production was brilliantly handled, including the use of Boris Karloff as Dr. Frankenstein's creature and James Whale as the director. However, the studio's risk taking was rewarded when the movie took Depression era audiences by storm.

It required a great deal of promotional effort to convince a reluctant publisher to take a chance on another Frankenstein story. Despite the quality of Schildt's story, even after the publishing contract was signed, the publisher was not fully convinced that such a venture could be turned into a great commercial success. At this point, however, fate took over and the pieces began to fall into place.

Once Simon & Schuster agreed to undertake the project, I spoke to Sara Karloff about reading the new novel. As daughter of the famed actor, Sara is inundated with such requests and refuses to be involved in most projects, because they do not begin to compare to her father's original works. Yet, something compelled her about this one.

She read the new novel, and not only agreed to endorse the work, she accepted my

invitation to write a forward to the novel. In her forward, Sara favorably compares *Frankenstein, The Legacy* with the classic 1931 movie. High praise, indeed, for the new creature. Just as Boris Karloff made such an important contribution to the original film, so has Sara continued the Karloff family ties to the Frankenstein legend through Schildt's new rendition of this classic horror masterpiece.

James Whale died at his home in a swimming pool accident. Only a few hours



later on that very day of that very year, a child was born who was destined to create the new monster that would carry on the Frankenstein legend. All his life, and for no reason he can explain, writer Schildt has had an unnatural fear of swimming pools. He adamantly refuses to have anything to do with them. Does this suggest an eerie connection between director Whale and author Schildt?

Even the manner in which Schildt became interested in the project shows evidence of forces beyond his control. Schildt had a successful career in screen writing, but felt compelled to write a novel. Many screenwriters make the transition from one form of writing to another, but this man had no definite idea in mind of what to do, how to cast around for a project worthy for a novel. Still searching for inspiration, he chanced to attend an auction and impulsively bid on an early Mary Shelley *Frankenstein*. He was successful in his bid. The night he brought the worn book home, he had a dream that changed his life.

Schildt stood on a frozen field in the dead of winter. Lowering gray skies were broken by fleeting wisps of dark clouds. A shrouded figure, the face lost in the folds of a hood, approached him from across the field. The

apparition was a woman who neared, then spoke simply. "You know who I am?" He sensed it was his deceased daughter, a child lost to him during the early years of her innocence. His child continued. "I hear of a world where there are colors. There are no colors here. Please, I want to live again."

In the morning when he awoke, Schildt had his inspiration. Now, the end result of that inspiration can be seen in the book called *Frankenstein, The Legacy*. It is an astounding book.

Reviewed by Ron Laitsch

Jacques Tourneur: The Cinema of Nightfall

by Chris Fujiwara (with a foreword by Martin Scorsese 317 pp. \$18.95 The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2715 N. Charles Street,

Baltimore Maryland 2121 www.jhuupbooks.com

As director of *Cat People*, *I Walked With A Zombie*, and *Curse Of The Demon*, Jacques Tourneur crafted three horror classics which, decades later, have lost none of their power to frighten audiences. And his 1947 film *Cat Of The Past* is still acknowledged as the quintessential film noir. Yet Tourneur himself remains underappreciated and his contribution to cinema history neglected. In interviews, Tourneur portrayed himself as a mere craftsman content to work on low-budget B-films. Many of his 33 films, however, reveal an extraordinarily fluid artistry absent from the routine studio fare of the era. Working in a variety of genres, from Westerns (*Canyon Passage*) and spy films (*Berlin Express*) to swashbucklers (*The Flame and The Arrow*), Tourneur imposed a personal cinematic vision which emphasized uncertainty and ambiguity.

In the first in-depth exploration of Tourneur's entire career, film writer Chris Fujiwara offers a detailed film-by-film analysis of the directors four French films, his 20 MCM shorts, his 29 studio films, and his work in television. Identifying the many qualities which unite this diverse oeuvre. For Fujiwara, mystery and sensuality, as well as a deliberately restrained expressionism, were the hallmarks of Tourneur's style, which frequently overcame the strained circumstances in which his films were made. Informative and immensely readable, this book provides an insightful and comprehensive study of an important and unjustly forgotten director.

Bob Stephens of the *San Francisco Examiner Magazine* states, "Fujiwara, one of our most perceptive writers about film, has put together a critical study of a great but somewhat obscure American director. This is essential reading for true movie lovers."

I found it to be sophisticated, essential reading for the classic horror movie fan and a well researched, critical work.

Reviewed by Gino Colbert

The Films Of John Carpenter

by John Muir

When you think of Horror and Sci-Fi movies the following come to mind, Dracula, Alien, Frankenstein, the Invisible Man and even the Mummy. When it comes to directors, there are only a handful of names that are synonymous with science fiction and terror. For many years John Carpenter has been one of those names. From the butcher knife-wielding mental institution escapee, to the alien life form inhabiting people's bodies in the Antartica, to a former armed forces hero now imprisoned in a futuristic New York City looking for the President of the United States in time to save the world, and deactivate lethal capsules implanted in his neck before it's too late. With Characters like these, how can you not become a fan of John Carpenter?

John Muir is obviously a fan of Carpenter, as well as a historian of movies. Not only does he introduce you to all of the films John Carpenter has created, but he also tells you the story behind the story. Muir takes you behind the directors chair, and lets you peek behind the curtain to see how Carpenter had to fight for certain films. Always remaining true to his art form, and his beliefs, Carpenter cared more about quality rather than quantity. In a business where your back is prone to more than just a few stabbings, it's refreshing to read about Carpenter's loyalty to a handful of actors he enjoyed both as friends and as colleagues.

If you are a John Carpenter fan, you will enjoy this book for its honesty, and accuracy. This book gives you an appreciation for not only his films and the message they are giving, but John Carpenter's homage to Howard Hawk, and Rio Bravo. In my opinion John Muir's, The Films Of John Carpenter will have you heading for the Horror and Sci-Fi section at your local video store!

Reviewed by "The Man of a Thousand Books."

Supertoys Last All Summer Long And Other Stories of Future Time

by Brian Aldiss \$13.95, 232pp, Gmfim Trade Paperback

Supertoys is the basis for the new Stanley Kubrick/Steven Spielberg film *AI*, which stars Haley Joel Osment and Jude Law. Originally published in 1969, it's the story of a robot boy who longs to be loved by his parents. He longs to make his mother happy, and tell her he loves her, but he can't quite seem to find the words. His verbal communication center is giving him trouble again. He may have to go back to the factory.

This collection contains the full cycle of all three Supertoys stories, as well as eleven additional tales of the future. Aldiss opens the collection with an essay about working with Stanley Kubrick, who found the title story so inspiring as to persuade Aldiss to sell him the film rights. After years of working together on the script, Kubrick passed away in 1999, and his unfinished works, including *Supertoys*, were inherited by Spielberg, who began shooting *AI* in June, 2000.

Brian Aldiss has won many awards during his career, and was recently named a Grand Master by the Science Fiction Writers of America. He lives in Oxford, England.

Reviewed by Gino Colbert



The Gorehound's Guide to Splatter Films of the 1960's and 1970's

By Scott Aaron Stine 304
pp. \$29.95 softcover
McFarland & Company,
Inc.

www.mcfarlandpub.com

For the uninitiated, as well as the initiated, the author has obligingly supplied a definition for the violence in graphic and grisly detail. This book is a detailed study of the splatter films of the 1960's and 1970's. The main bite of the book is the exhaustive filmography of each film that includes extensive credits, alternate names and foreign release titles.

It also provides the availability of the film on videocassette as well as the availability of soundtracks and film novelization and

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Reviewed by Krysta Olson

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Superboy & Superpup

Episode Guide To
The Lost Videos

Written By Chuck Harter



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"EVERYTHING NOT KNOWN"

This article, written while Francis Coppola was hard at work on *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, is an oddity of sorts: a survey of a great work by a major director from an onlooker's point of view. Fortunately, that onlooker was unusually well-informed about her subject, since her name was Eleanor Coppola, a woman hired by her famed filmmaker husband to shoot a documentary about the primary topic of this discussion, Francis Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*.

Eleanor was on location for most of the legendarily difficult filming of what some consider to be both Francis Coppola's greatest work and the best American movie about the nightmarish U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Though *Hearts of Darkness*, the film that eventually was carved out of Eleanor's documentary footage with an assist from filmmakers Fax Bahr and George Hickenlooper, suffered a bit both from an at times overly worshipful view of its subject and from its refusal to address such difficult issues as Francis Coppola's very nearly marriage-destroying affair during filming with an aspiring screenwriter (an affair Eleanor had written about extensively and with surprising frankness in her book-length *Apocalypse Now* memoir "Notes"), *Hearts of Darkness* offered a riveting view of a production run amok, as well as the strange process by which Francis Coppola somehow managed to carve a masterwork out of all that chaos anyhow.

Talking Chaos in the Heart of Darkness With Eleanor Coppola

by Ray Greene

With the rerelease of a vastly expanded recut of *Apocalypse Now* coming soon to a theatre near you, Eleanor's comments about the film's making seemed more than worth revisiting, which is why *Cult Movies* is bringing them to you.

The Benedict Canyon bungalow is surprisingly modest and bohemian, the kind of crash pad a struggling art student might move into if Beverly Hills property values were to fall suddenly by a factor of fifteen. Nothing in the tasteful simplicity of the furnishings suggests the identity or even the occupation of the couple who live here, save a large French-language poster for the Alexander Korda production of *The Thief of Bagdad* ("It's one of Francis' favorite films," says Eleanor Coppola). In direct contrast to the fabled opulence of the Napa Valley residence that is their full-time home, the Coppolas live with little more than the bare necessities of life when visiting greater Los Angeles—necessities which in their case include a smallish but fully-operational screening room, where Francis Ford Coppola can view the dailies from his work-in-progress, *Bram Stoker's Dracula*.

Dracula is Francis Coppola's reason for coming to L. A., but Eleanor Coppola has reasons of her own. Chief among them is the Los Angeles premiere of *Hearts of Darkness*, a documentary about the filming of Francis Coppola's Vietnam epic *Apocalypse Now*. The *Apocalypse* shoot was one of the most troubled in modern movie history. During production, the film suffered multiple crises including a set-destroying typhoon, major casting changes requiring extensive re-shooting, the life-threatening heart attack of leading man Martin Sheen, and the chronic absenteeism of helicopters supplied by the Philippine government, which had an unnerving tendency to disappear into the countryside to combat leftist rebels fighting for the removal of then-dictator Ferdinand Marcos. Eleanor Coppola not only survived *Apocalypse Now*, she was there to capture the drama behind the drama on film. Hired by her husband to shoot a five-minute promotional movie, Ms. Coppola returned from the Philippines with over sixty hours of film and forty hours of audio tape, a stockpile of materials so vast that for many years the Coppolas were at a loss as to what to do with them. Contacted by documentarians Fax Bahr and George Hickenlooper, the Coppolas decided the time had arrived to open the vaults.

Since premiering at Cannes last year, *Hearts* has ridden a rising tide of critical acclaim, in its own way rivaling, and in some quarters even surpassing, the original response to *Apocalypse Now* itself. Though Bahr and Hickenlooper deserve their fair share of praise for organizing the materials and conducting follow-up interviews with many of the major players, much of what is truly remarkable about *Hearts of Darkness* was provided by Eleanor Coppola, whose intimate access to the original production, coupled with a scrupulous eye for telling details, lends to *Hearts of Darkness* a level of honest immediacy that simply couldn't have been obtained from any other source.

Ray Greene: Why after all this time a movie about the making of *Apocalypse Now*? What contributed to the decision, eleven, twelve years down the road, to put this together?

Eleanor Coppola: Well I guess to go back to the beginning, I initially was assigned to get five minutes worth of footage to make a little television spot to promote *Apocalypse Now*. And of course the project went on so long and I shot so much footage that I came back from the Philippines with fifty hours of film and forty hours of audio tape...So there were all these forces on the documentary...and at one point we just said, 'Let's put this away for now.' We got the film out ourselves maybe about five years ago and said, 'Should we cut this into something?' And we realized that we didn't have the objectivity to do it in a way...And when George Hickenlooper's company came forward and said they'd heard that there was this documentary footage, and Fax Bahr I guess had been a fan of *Apocalypse Now*...And so they came with a package of financing and a plan.

RG: Watching *Hearts of Darkness*, there's a sense that part of what the documentary is doing is setting the record straight, because there was such wild speculation in the press during the production about what was going on.

EC: I think that it does sort of serve to set the record straight, but I don't know that that was the point...

RG: It's more a side effect than a conscious intention?

EC: Yeah. I think this now starts to be the record instead of the record at that point in time.

RG: Did you ever find that there was a conflict between the woman who was the supporter of the man making the film and the documentarian who's saying these problems are fascinating, this is great material? I can see it being an almost schizophrenic situation, one part of you wants to console him, and one part of you wants him to keep going until you're sure you have enough on tape.

EC: [laughs]. Well, you're right. Both of those exist. But I think Francis knew at the bottom line if he was in real trouble, that I'd drop the camera and run to him, which I did. Whereas another kind of regular documentary team would've gone for the blood. But if

he got too stressed of course I would just drop my camera to address whatever was really happening with him. If it was something that would get too dramatic, I think I wouldn't have been the filmmaker, I'd've been the wife. If he fell off a piece of scaffolding, I wasn't getting the shot, I was on my way.



Above: Francis Coppola directs Brando's performance as Col. Kurtz
Below: *Apocalypse Now*'s famous heli-attack, set to Wagner opera



RG: Many of the most revealing comments in the film were attributed to your recording Francis in private moments without his knowledge...

EC: Well, a little bit has been exaggerated about that I think... Francis is very articulate. I thought that even he would like to know in retrospect what he was really thinking about, what he was saying. So I liked to throw that tape recorder out there somewhere. He was just so absorbed in what was going on he could care less that there was a tape recorder there...It does have that very revealing view of his inner thinking process.

RG: As the film points out, *Apocalypse Now* received a lot of very hostile press before it had even been seen. What's your opinion of people prejudging on the basis of

costs, falling behind schedule, all these things, what does that do to the art, what does that do to the filmmaker who is struggling to make something special?

EC: Well that's always been very painful and frustrating for Francis to be dogged with that kind of press preconception of what he's doing. I went on the international press trip after the film opened, and of course at a press conference, the first question they asked was 'well, how much did this film cost, why did it cost so much' and so forth. And it always hurt Francis feelings that they didn't talk about the film that was on the screen. And the budget, since he was putting up his personal cash, and gave the financing himself personally, who cares on one level about that? I mean, that's his problem and his personal difficulty, he's paying the price for that, but what about what's on the screen? It is a curious phenomenon that the press seems to want to sort of go after.

RG: How did it feel to know that back in the States, this ballooning speculation was running amok? Do you think that had any effect on the work as we see it today?

EC: I don't think it affected the work per se, but it affected Francis. It was painful for him, I mean there's a certain kind of rejection, or a certain kind of not taking him seriously as a filmmaker because you're not talking about what's in the film, you're talking about the catastrophe...He didn't want everybody looking at him when he was trying to wade through his difficulties, and he didn't really want people out there to see that he was in those difficulties, he wanted the opportunity to pull through it as best he could and so forth. So I think his own personal seeming hostile to the press sort of brought them all down on him.

RG: And then of course there were unforeseen acts of God that contributed to the notion that things were not under control...

EC: Yes. So the press didn't come, and they just sat back here and speculated about what a disaster it was.

RG: When you saw the completed work, *Hearts of Darkness*, how did you feel about what had been accomplished, your sense of what it does as a movie?

EC: Well, I actually was invited to come to the editing room quite a few times along the way...

RG: It wasn't a surprise.

EC: It wasn't a surprise. I didn't have that kind of moment you speak of when you sort of suddenly see it all.

RG: Well, did that moment come when for instance Gene Siskel put *Hearts of Darkness* at the head of his ten best list for the year?

EC: [smiles] I am totally amazed and fascinated that it's gotten this kind of reception.

RG: The same pundits who were predicting doom and gloom at the time are fascinated by the spectacle of a filmmaker dealing with doom and gloom and sort of carving a movie out of it anyway. It's intriguing. There's a lot of paradoxes in the reaction.

EC: Yeah. I think Siskel didn't like the film when it came out, so it's sort of interesting for him to put the documentary high on his list. Ebert liked it. I remember him coming to our house and interview-

ing Francis, but Siskel when it came out was not a champion of *Apocalypse*.

RG: One thing that you said in the documentary that I really want to follow up on was the notion that Francis had always wanted a colony of poets, writers, creative folk assembled into Zoetrope, and you realized in the midst of all of this going on that it was here, it was right there in front of you. That 'unlooked for it' had sort of occurred. Now, up to that point in the movie, I'm watching with fascination and horror at all the things going wrong, and then this statement was made that this magical thing had occurred. I wondered about that perception, where it came from and how *Apocalypse Now* seemed to epitomize that for you.

EC: Francis had, you know, he'd left the Los Angeles area and gone to San Francisco, and tried in north beach there where his building was...he'd hoped there'd be this group of artists who'd be drawn together, and writers and filmmakers, you know, what you always want is that bohemian life of Paris in the twenties or whatever it is we read about. Where is it for our time in life? And why can't it be where we are and why can't we be in it? There's that wanting to be where it's at among the artisans and writers. And at one point I just had this thought while I was in the Philippines, you know, you think it's going to be in San Francisco in the cappuccino bars and the coffee houses and the theaters and whatever it is in that area. But in truth it was where we were, we just didn't recognize it because...[laughs].

RG: Is it a question of finding out that there's a certain amount of blood that goes with that picture of bohemian paradise? We may look back on F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald and Hemingway as these wonderful, picturesque folk on the Left Bank, but they were in and out of sanitariums the whole time as well.

EC: Yeah. And if you're in it you don't recognize it as a period or a time probably either. I mean they didn't think that they were living inside some golden moment or something.

RG: A moment ago, you said you found some subsequent films that Francis has worked on comparable experiences in terms of the level of danger or the level of...

EC: Different kinds of complications and problems and issues he has to overcome

in the course of the filmmaking process. I think where people become confused is they think a filmmaker, they just write the film and then they prepare it and then they do the production, and the production part's sort of like the manufacturing of the script. But Francis' process, he is a creative person at all of the stages... It's not like he said, 'well, check the min insurance, we've got to stop here now 'cause we don't have rain in the script...' It isn't just like a TV thing where they sit down and manufacture it in five days. He's in the throws of the creative process all the way along. A lot of people who've seen it tell me that they had no idea that it's that hard to make a film. You know, anyone whose ever been in that process can sort of recognize it, that yes it's true...

RG: But certainly never in the process at that level, with typhoons and Marlon Brando not reading the book...

EC: [laughs] That just added to it. People who make films, even little films, they go through all kinds of hell.

RG: But the inference of the film is that with his particular technique, he sort of gravitates toward chaos as part of his creative process. Is that an unfair thing to say? The sense that there's a certain necessary level of unpredictability in order for him to be creative, from comments like 'everyone says Francis works best in a crisis.'

EC: Yeah, I think people say that. Crisis maybe is not the right word, but maybe the true definition of chaos, which is 'everything not known.' He does encourage the spontaneous moment. So to someone else that can look like chaos or crisis, because it's not the best business policy or whatever to have these unknown elements. You don't know if you're going to stick to your budget, you don't know what's going to happen. Producers of films are always trying to control everything, 'cause they want to see if they're on time or budget, taking control of the linear process. And Francis works out of having a lot of things in motion... He uses the things around him to try to get a real moment or a unique moment on film, it isn't just some canned, prescribed thing that had been written many months before... Francis is still sort of stirring things up so they stay alive. And that results in what some people will call moments of crisis or moments of chaos, because the unknown is all kind of out there on the table. ■

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Going to Transylvania was the closest thing to a dream come true.

The charms of Transylvania are far more diverse than my initial visions of haunted castles laced with legends of vampires and werewolves. Imagine a Universal vampire movie set come to life. The incredible mountain scenery speckled with scores of rural villages that time forgot are memories that can never be erased. For those who don't know, Transylvania is the Central-most province of Romania, bordered by the Carpathian Mountains. It is located on the Black Sea north of Turkey, South of Hungary and East of Serbia, Croatia and Albania.

But the best thing about our trip was the company, all interesting, all like-minded. I made good friends with whom I intend to stay in touch with, for a long time. Our diverse group was composed (or decomposed, as the case may be) of several true Goths, a teacher, a doctor, a DJ, a dance instructor, a tattoo artist, a lawyer (whom some assumed was just another word for vampire), a photographer, a chef and, basically, travelers from every walk of life.

Radu, our terrific tour guide, relentlessly recounted tales of each town we passed, sharing with us the not-so-well-known gory details we all craved. The enthusiasm and savoir-faire of our tour organizer, Charles, was key in making our tour of Transylvania a total success. He even brought a collection of classic horror films to make travel time more enjoyable. I don't think I'll ever forget "the tortured undulations of the unwanted virgins"... but that's another story <lol>

The weather was wonderful. Upon our arrival, we were snow was expected. Fortunately the fair weather gods prevailed there was neither snow

nor extreme cold; during day hours a light jacket was just fine.

Day 1 - Departure

Our departure was scheduled for Saturday evening out of JFK airport in New York. I packed my passport, camera, extra warm clothes, a dictionary, guide to Romania, my wooden stake and left for the unholy land of Transylvania in search of Vlad Tepes! Recognizing our tour group at the airport was identifiable by the classic shot of Bela Lugosi on his clipboard in one hand and his copy of "Cult Movies" in the other. We landed safely on Romanian soil ready for our unique vacation adventure.

Arrival

At Otopeni Airport officials gave us the Romanian equivalent of a VIP welcome, we were escorted through customs and directed to our noble "coach of my homes." Without delay, our tour guide Radu (a popular name, coincidentally named after Vlad's evil brother) introduced us to this foreign land of many mysteries by delving into Romania's history. Most of us were quite exhausted, but those who managed to stay conscious learned quite a bit about the Wallachian Prince, Vlad Tepes. I was entranced by the striking landscape. There was so much land, rolling hills that faded into the hazy mist, glistering snow peaks on and mountain tops, picturesque villages embraced by evergreen expanses, steep drops of rocky mountain escapes right outside my window, and the narrowest downhill made tame only by countless tight hair-pin bends. We soon came to realize that it would be our noble driver who would be providing the "real" scares on this trip.

Brasov

Our first stop in Transylvania was Brasov (pronounced "Bash-off"). We stayed at the Ana Palace, a 4 star hotel, where we had our first Romanian meal. Several of us had special dietary needs but throughout the trip, and the restaurants always did their best to accommodate us. Even though it was late and we were quite tired, we ventured out to explore this cobblestone paved, 13th century German-built city. The atmosphere was thick with history, ancient shadows loomed around every corner. The braver ones in the group dared to enter the "Heroes' Cemetery" where among those buried, are 62 people that died in Brasov on 12/23/1989 during the revolution, those grounds are said to be haunted. We headed to an Internet cafe, "The Aurora," where we enjoyed Turkish coffee and a cheese delicacy called "cacuvala." The braver members of the group ended up winning US dollars at "Bunbur" a go-go. Yes, they do have go-go bars in Transylvania. It turns out that three of the women on our tour who went to the "go-go" club actually wound up dancing on stage into the wee hours (no word on if they kept their clothes on).

Tom between checking my e-mail or getting some well-deserved sleep. I opted for the latter, discovering that the rooms were actually quite comfortable.

Day 2 - Brasov, Bran & Targa Mures

Brasov

We woke to a wonderful day and an amazing view of Brasov from our balcony. After a full breakfast we headed out to the Pula Stalari, the central square lined with baroque facades, pleasant cafes and vendors. The

first Romanian wood I used was "negra" - black, essential when shopping. Towering above the town was the Black Church or *Biserica Neagra*, 1385, named after a fire in the late 1600's. Now it is no longer black due to recent renovation. This very large Gothic church is the home of a Buchholz organ, 1839, with 4000 pipes (wow!) remarkably preserved and still operating. Equally impressive is the church bell, weighing 7 metric tons. In the square's center stands the old council house or *Casa Stalari*, 1420, presently Brasov's history museum. It was there that Vlad Tepes met with other royalty to propose laws, hold court, address subjects and be judged himself.

In the 15th century, a 3km protective wall was built against the Turks. Catherine's Gatehouse, or *Poarta Ecaterinei* was one of the 7 bastions erected, another was on Tampa Hill immediately over the town. It was there, that Vlad Tepes held his infamous meal whilst impaled men slowly died on stakes around him. Regrettably we didn't have a chance to hike to the top. Beautiful churches of various faiths are scattered throughout Brasov.

Bran

30 km south of Brasov is Bran with its luxury villas and private cottages, quite beautiful, yet not very representative of rural Romania. Bran Castle, 1357, with its whitewashed fairy tale turret walls was "culturally" far from menacing but still quite beautiful. It is breathtaking, with numerous rooms and countless corridors and passageways. A well in the courtyard conceals the entrance to a labyrinth of secret underground passages. Queen Marie (1875-1938), aka "The Warner Queen" imported much of the original furniture, which is still in there. Contrary to popular belief, Bran Castle used in Bram Stoker's movie, "Dracula," was not built by Vlad Tepes, but by the people from Brasov to defend the Bran Mountain Pass from the Turks. Vlad's connection with Bran Castle is the few months he spent imprisoned there by his half-brother Vlad The Monk, in a small alcove endowed with a 3"x15" window, where he supposedly continued his unpalatable fetid, but this time with cats & birds. Before leaving Bran Castle, we posed for a group shot on the steps leading to the entrance and we did some extensive shopping in the bazaar outside the castle gates.

Our money went a very long way in these markets. For \$100 U.S., the exchange rate was 2,500,000 Romanian Lei. In this country, we were all millionaires! The local joke is that if you're a millionaire in Romania, you're either a soccer player, a rock star or an American. One night, we bought a five-course gourmet meal for 4 including a bottle of wine for only \$20 total. Someone bought a leather vest plus 3 woolen sweaters for \$16. Needless to say, we shopped whenever possible.

Targa Mures

We arrived just in time for dinner at the Contanental Hotel in Targa Mures (pronounced "TEER go mure REE"). Some of the items on the menu included steak tea and calf's brains - <gasp! none for me thanks. The sun had set, the night air was inviting, plus there was a large Roman Catholic Cemetery just waiting to be explored. The five of us who went to this graveyard to "dig up" some mischief weren't disappointed. We had to climb a fence to get in, and we took many photos near some of the more elaborate tombs and mausoleums. Much happened that night in that eerie cemetery. A mutual fire beacon was lit as if welcoming us, there were

disembodied growls in the far & near distance, glowing eyes following us, statues seemingly moving, while buzzsaw screams compelled us to do unthinkable deeds that are better left unsaid. I still don't think it was a good idea to give the gypsy boy that set of lungs.

Targu Mures was first established as a garrison city, later becoming a prominent center. It seemed to be a place yet interesting city with many cathedrals, plazas and schools well worth further exploration.

Day 3 - Blaria, Borgo Pass, & Piata Fantanele Bistria

It was here that Bram Stoker's leading character, Jonathan Harker, stayed the night before continuing his journey to Dracula's Castle. Following in Harker's footsteps, our group stopped at Bistria, at the Golden Crown Inn or the 'Căminul de Aur,' for lunch at the 'Harker Restaurant.' We were very impressed with the detail of the meal, the same as Harker enjoyed in the novel. Just before dinner, a gypsy woman presented us each with a dove of garb for our journey onward. We accepted the dove with the right hand, according to tradition, to ward off the vampire, known as the 'syrigoi' in Romanian tongue. The *Sourme grandiose* meal was as delectable as it was meticulously decorated, the centerpiece were quite the embodiment of Halloween and the staff was curiously adorned in black capes. We took turns toasting over the native 'Blood liquor' (an incredibly potent plum brandy), and it was here that the group started to really get, with everyone getting to know everyone's names. One of our team members, Linda, may still be hung over from her beady intake.

Borgo Pass, aka Thutusa Pass

How I wanted to find Borgo Pass on the map. I was beginning to think we were heading into lands unknown. But finally after struggling with my guidebook, I discovered its official name: Thutusa Pass. Once again the scenery was breathtaking, but here even more so. We came across seemingly endless forests occasionally split by deep chains lined with snaky rivers, there were swamps, and dangerous mountain trails, that truly captured the essence of Harker's perilous trail fitting Stoker's description perfectly. Here I felt very, very far from New York.

Hotel Castle Dracula at Piata Fantanele

At the highest point of Borgo Pass, there was Hotel Castle Dracula. Once a modest castle at the highest point in the Borgo Pass, this is now a four-star hotel, and our home for All Hallows Eve. The sunset view from the top was magnificent. It was pleased to find the hotel decorated in good taste while the staff was very courteous. Upon arrival, everyone in the group made their way to their rooms to prepare their make-up and outfits. Before long we were in the reception area sporting costumes. The Romanian post office was was enough to issue a special Vlad stamp for the occasion (we figured it was prepared exclusively for us), and they set up a display so that we could purchase individual stamps, commemorative sheets, first-day covers and other philatelic collectibles. Some of us also purchased "after-life" insurance policies from the hotel receptionist, plus postcards and other souvenirs. We began our elaborated masquerade dinner party and the costumes were really great!

This year nearly everyone wore a prize. There were two sets of honey-mooners, and one of the couples

(Jennifer and Erik, who had wed just a few days prior on Friday the 13th) was lifted in chains in a ceremonial Eastern European wedding dance. They were voted "most beautiful" couple. "Scariest couple" went to two brothers, Tom & Kevin, who designed their outfits so they looked like mutilated zombies. "Scariest individual" was our green witch, Angel, who was totally unrecognizable under her brilliant make-up. Vanessa was a close second as a ghastly vampress in white. Although Roberta and Tina exuded sexuality and beauty, it was Nicole and Amanda who won in the "Sexiest" category, with clever use of plush velvet, Elvira sensibility and the ample display of cleavage. "Best Overall Costume" winners were Martin and Lori, with their recreation of Beaulieu and Lydia from the film *Beastly*. Other outstanding costumes were John and Heather as Xander and Willow from the 'Buffy' episode, 'I Wish.' Everyone got into the spirit of things, in more ways than one.

The dinner party was accompanied by live Gypsy musicians as well as a local DJ. He didn't know what we liked, so we took over, with music brought along by our own pro DJ Paul (with choices by our new DJ, Heather). In between our five-course meal, we danced to cuts from the soundtracks of *'Phantom'* & *'Rocky Horror'* along with favorites by the Cure, Meatloaf, Warren Zevon (*'Werewolves of London'*), of course, Sisters of Mercy and just about every genre of music. Yes, we did the 'Monster Mash' and the 'Time Warp.' At midnight we adjourned to the outdoor courtyard for The 'Witches Borne.' It was quite something - the gypsy musicians continued playing, and while we drank hot, mulled wine, some of us danced in circles "horra" style. We were drinking, chanting and dancing under the stars until the fire was no more. But the night did not end there. Back at the hotel, we were led through a secret passage on a short candlelit tour of a rather under-done Dracula's Dungeon, with macabre murals of Vampyres surrounding us (not recommended for the faint of heart).

We took turns posing in the coffin while merry-making continued through the night in the main hall. The festivities continued until past 3AM. That night I slept with my window open <g>ugh> I haven't been quite the same since.

Day 4 - Sighisoara & Brasov Sighisoara

We left Hotel Castle Dracula at about noon into our descent trip through Borgo Pass, past Bistria to our next destination, the perfectly preserved medieval town in a charming hilly countryside called Sighisoara (pronounced 'sigh-so-AR-ah'). A 14th century wall with nine towers remaining out of the original 34, encircles sloped cobblestone streets, brazier houses and a myriad of beautifully aged churches. Sighisoara, the birthplace of Vlad Tepes (in 1431), survives graciously untouched by time. The citadel's main entrance is the archway of a massive "clocktower" clock tower. After a perilous climb to the top, we found the clock to contain a pagant of German figurines. The tower is now a history museum displaying among other things a large collection of rustic ceramics, various occupational tools, a scale model of the citadel, as well as a magnificent view from the 7th floor balcony. We were invited to enter an original torture chamber with ceiling and walls still stained by the original black soot of prisoners burned alive. There were diagrams depicting various methods of

torture plus a few original punishment (behavior correction) devices, one of them a heavy public display collar stone that read, "Don't be a wicked person like me."

The Central Plaza, or Piata Centrala, is the heart of Sighisoara. It was getting late and it was quite deserted, but it was there that markets, public executions, as well as witch trials took place. Across the way is the house where Vlad Tepes was born in 1431, and lived until the age of 4. It is now a restaurant where we had our first meal of the day, indulging our ghoulish hunger on chicken liver stew <g>ugh> (none for me thanks). The Dracol House not only maintains the original river stone floor, but also reveals a fresco fragment under the ceiling of an ever-vigilant Dracula's father.

After dinner, with the help of flashlights we climbed the 172 uphill steps of a haunted corridor stairway "scara acoperita", 1642, to the Gothic Lutheran church "Biserica din Deal", 1365, adjacent to a large German cemetery unlike any other. Even though I crossed it at night in practically pitch dark, just the other day I glanced at the TV and recognized the cemetery on the screen, I watched a little longer and I was right, it was Sighisoara! We took strength in our numbers and were not accused by any of the undead.

Brasov

That night we stayed at Brasov, at the Ars Hotel once more, and we were all quite restless. Some chose to go bare tasting, while a group of us gathered in the plaza across the way to share paranormal stories, the tale of the Grandfather's ghost, the vanishing little girl, the waiting pink lady, the lost puppy, the dead landlord, poltergeist activity, even bizarre, unexplainable dreams. It was a creepy night, but a nice way to cap a full day.

Day 5 - Targuville, Snagov Monastery & Bucharest Targuville

The next day we set out for Targuville (pronounced 'teer go VISH ruh'), whose main attraction is the Princely Court of Dracula or 'Curtea Domneasca', now a mass of crumbling ramparts with a few better-preserved sections. It was there that Vlad Tepes constituted many of the cruelties attributed to him in historical documents. The 'Sun Tower' was built by Vlad in 1468. It was here that he watched from the balcony as Turks were put to death by being impaled on tall spikes. Nearly the ruins is a large stone-carved bust of Vlad VI. According to our guide Rada (who by now we were calling Raga, as in the spaghetti sauce), there are only three places in all of Romania that have documented, factual connections with Dracula: the Sun Tower in Targuville, Vlad's birthplace in Sighisoara and the third in Bucharest, named by Vlad in a document written by his hand.

Snagov Monastery

When we finally found our way to the mysterious island of Snagov the sun was slipping away. The adventure was well worth it, the majority of us concerned, and this was one of the best parts of the trip. We took rowboats across the lake to go to the island, where the holy ground is marked by a large wooden cross. In his day, Vlad Tepes built fortifications around this monastery: a bell tower, a north church, an escape tunnel, a prison/torture chamber, and a not very sturdy bridge from the lake to the mainland. Today all of these are gone, except for the church, presently undergoing serious restoration. This church, 1456, houses the tomb believed to contain Dracula's remains, it is now topped

with concrete, marked only by a humble portrait. We passed by this unadorned stone slab in front of the altar. The waters are said to be haunted by the spirits of the 60 plus prisoners who drowned when Vlad's bridge collapsed. Also, Vlad's treasure yet to be discovered, is said to lie somewhere at the bottom of Snagov Lake. It was getting dark so again on the rowboats we returned back to the mainland with big clumsy smiles.

Bucharest

Wow! The Boulevard Hotel was quite something. Ostentatious chandeliers, marble staircases, arched entrances, columned hallways, ballroom-class dining rooms, French Provincial/Louis the XVI furnished rooms - very regal and impressive. That night we had a much welcomed roast chicken dinner at the Deacal Restaurant, "Club Count Dracula," where there were secret passages to hidden rooms, genuine animal skins, gowns, masks and photos from Dracula movies adorning the walls, skulls and chains hanging from the ceilings, with candles and taxidermy everywhere. Without warning, a very dramatic Count Dracula emerged from his dungeon tomb and welcomed us to his home. His voice was stent, his demeanor eerie and peculiar, actually not a bad Dracula, circa Hammer's Christopher Lee. He decided to abduct one of our group,

April - I guess he didn't care she was on her honeymoon, and her new husband Dustin didn't dare rescue her - she was having too much fun. The Count led her down to his dungeon and was about to sink his fangs into her neck. Fortunately, I was there with my wooden stake, Mr. Pourby, and without hesitation, I properly applied it deeply into his chest. Dracula was slain - but I have a feeling he'll be back.

After dinner we set out to explore Bucharest's nightlife. Scene of us went to the many casinos, while others just simply walked around town sightseeing. My little group discovered a covered road lined with quaint little restaurants and bars. We opted for a nice little pub called "The Blues Club" where we spent the rest of the evening sitting outside drinking "Urmas" beer and sipping red, red wine.

Day 6 - The Last Day

Bucharest

What do you mean we are leaving today?? I could have sworn we had a few more days left. In a bold attempt to see and learn a bit more about Bucharest, a few of us took the subway with Rada to the National Art Museum or "Muzeei National de Arta si Romanie" where we did some more souvenir shopping. On our way to the airport, Rada squeezed in a proper panocaut

sightseeing tour of the metropolis. It was Vlad Tepes who first established Bucharest as his princely residence and military post. Having survived several severe earthquakes, much of Bucharest's architectural history has been lost, however it is quite obvious that they have attempted to preserve a certain antique aesthetic even with the newly erect buildings. Bucharest's tree-lined boulevards, flattery public monuments, with its many Orthodox churches give it a certain air of mysticism.

A last glance at Bucharest concluded our grand tour. We headed back to Otopeni Airport where we talked about our next visit to Romania and did some more souvenir shopping. We continued uneventfully back to America.

Not bad for a week that will live forever, and what better way to spend Halloween than in the "Land of Dracula"? I had a wonderful time. It's a once-in-a-lifetime journey I would recommend for everyone. Even the undead would have the time of their lives! Fangs for the memories.

Editor's Note: "DraculaTour" is an annual event. For further information on the upcoming ultimate Vampire Vacation, DraculaTour, October 28 - Nov. 4, 2001, contact: "Tales of Terror," 715 Derby Avenue, Orange CT 06467 USA. Phone: (203) 795-4722 or toll-free (866) D-L-U-G-O-S-I. Website: www.bloodymatters.com

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Spotlight On Hollywood

by Eric Caidin

The 27th annual awards show of the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films was held on Tuesday, June 12th at the Park Hyatt Hotel in Century City. The founder and president of the Academy, Dr. Donald A. Reed passed away on March 18th of this year. The award ceremony was both a tribute and a celebration honoring his life.

A very touching video featuring classic interviews with Dr. Reed and past academy honorees was shown on a big screen to a full house of Dr. Reed's friends and colleagues. It was an evening to remember and a round of applause goes to director Steve Carter and Co., producers and writers the Marcus Brothers, and Acting Director Robert Holguin for presenting a well paced show featuring a who's who of genre actors, actresses, and other celebrities. Host Bruce Boxleitner, popular star of *Babylon 5*, kept things moving quickly as major awards were presented.

Final Destination took home the award for Best Horror Film. *Frequency* was selected Best Fantasy Film and *X-Men* won the best Sci-Fi Film Award. Other awards went to *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* for Best Network Show and *Fanscape* for best Syndicated/Cable TV Program.

The Lifetime Achievement Award was given to Ron Grazier, Ron Howard's partner at Imagine Entertainment, whose film production credits included such outstanding films as *Splash*, *The Nutty Professor*, *Psycho* and the live action version of *How The Grinch Stole Christmas*. The Service Award went to Classic Sci-Fi Curator and Historian Bob Burns. Sam Raimi, director of the *Evil Dead* trilogy, received the George Pal Memorial Award. For a complete list of all the Saturn Award winners and information about joining the Academy of Sci-Fi, Fantasy and Horror, you can write 334 West 54th St., Los Angeles, CA 90036-3806 or phone 323-752-5811.

Recently, AFI put out their list of the Top 100 Thriller films which can be printed out online at AFIonline.org. This particular list made no sense at all as it encompassed too many genres. How they were able to classify such films as *2001*, *Wizard of Oz*, *Safety Last*, *Thelma and Louise* or *All the Presidents Men* as thrillers is beyond me.

FYI, here is the AFI top 10 Thriller List: *Psycho*, *Jaws*, *The Exorcist*, *North By Northwest*, *Silence of the Lambs*, *Alien*, *The Birds*, *The French Connection*, *Rosemary's Baby*, and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. If you like, send us your list care of *Cult Movies* magazine. We'd like to know what you think.

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By Michael Copner

The good news is that a new Andy Milligan film has resurfaced, and to some people that will be like finding the Holy Grail. Or discovering a piece of music by Bach that no one knew about. Or at the very least, Jackie Gleason fans discovering a new lost episode of *The Honeymooners*. It's *Surgikill*, and it's something fantastic that's been resting, relatively unknown since 1988. Andy Milligan fans have heard of it, seen it on checklists, but never known much about it.

Milligan has been called "the Ed Wood of the east coast," since most of his films were produced in New York. Similar to Wood, his main filmic output was in horror material, but he got his start with adult films. His first movie was shot over weekends in 1963 and sold to producer William Mishkin, a veteran nude producer. It was first released as *The Promiscuous Sex*, later reissued as *The Shocking Sex*.

Another of his adult films was *Girls of 42nd Street*, also known as *Flesh Pot on 42nd Street*. It is a gritty, psycho-drama every bit as good as the products of Harry Novak, Doris Wishman, Dave Friedman, and other contemporaries in the field. This is one of my favorite Milligan films, along with *The Ghastly Ones*, his greatest entry into bloody horror.

I have exactly one Andy Milligan story to tell, and it comes from very late in Milligan's life. Looking for stills for *Cult Movies* in the vast files of Cinema Collectors, the Hollywood store owned by Buddy Barnett, I was totally unaware of other customers coming in and out of the place. One gentleman came in with bags of photos and pressbooks to sell, and wondered if the store

would buy them from him. A clerk went back to back offices and told Buddy about the gentleman. Buddy recognized him as Andy Milligan on sight. He looked through Andy's things, saw he had collectibles from Andy's own films as well as many other big studio titles. Buddy bought many items while they talked, and asked Andy to autograph a few items. Andy was quite pleased that someone would know him and want his autograph. We talked for a while, Andy mentioning that he'd relocated to Hollywood and had just directed a few films. *Surgikill* was one of these. Then Andy left, seemingly to hit a few other collector shops and sell some of his things. That was the one and only time I ever saw Andy Milligan. A few weeks later, on June 3rd of 1991 he died of AIDS-related pneumonia, at the age of 62.

Though treated with derision by critics and film historians during his heyday in the 1960s and '70s, Milligan's work has been the subject of renewed interest by young film buffs in more recent times, particularly through articles in fanzines like *Sleazebag Express* and *Video Watchdog*.

Born Feb. 12, 1929 in St. Paul, Minn., Milligan began in show business in the early 1950's as a puppeteer and actor. He appeared on live TV in *Kraft Theater*, *Armstrong Theater*, *Studio One* and *I Remember Mama*.

Andy wrote, directed, and photographed 24 feature films in New York, all on budgets of \$10,000 or less. Most were shot on 16mm and blown up to 35mm for theatrical release. His 1965 film *Vapors* was an early example of crossover; the film played simultaneously at the Cameo grindhouse near 42nd Street and at the Bridge art theater. The film was gay themed, and one of the first publicly shown motion pictures to feature full-frontal nudity.

His other 1960's films include *The Naked Witch* (not to be confused with an earlier film of that title shot in the South), *The Degenerates*, *Depraved*, *The Filthy Five*, *Tricks of The Trade*, and *Gutter Trash*.

He started filming in 35mm with *Bloodthirsty Butchers* (1970), *The Man With Two Heads* (a version of Jekyll and Hyde), *The Body Beneath*, *Guru - The Mad Monk*, *The Torture Dungeon*, and a remake of *The Ghastly Ones* titled *Legacy of Blood*. One of his most creative titles was *The Rats Are Coming!* *The Werewolves Are Here!* These films were shot alternately in New York or England.

In the early 1960's Milligan also directed plays off-Broadway at Caffé Cino, and later ran the Troupe Theater on 48th Street at Times Square, directing a mixture of classics like *A Doll's House* and his own plays.

In 1983 he filmed *Hellhouse*, released on video as *Carnage*. Shortly thereafter he moved to Los Angeles and shot three final features, *The Weirdo* (a remake of a never-released Milligan film of the same title), *Monstrosity* and finally *Surgikill*.

I was first made aware of *Surgikill* when we received a call from Bouvier, an actress who plays the lead part in *Surgikill*. She and her

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partner John Van Harlingen had produced the film, and wondered if this might be a good time to release the picture to the world. Bouvier still has the copy of the *Los Angeles Times* where she noticed the classified ad placed by Milligan, seeking to set up production on his new film. The ad reads: "LO Budget Film maker, Track rec. seeks Money Partner. Object-new co." It's followed by an old Hollywood phone number. This ad, and the phone calls which ensued, brought *Surgikill* into reality.

I recognized Bouvier as an actress I'd seen on TV soap operas in the 1970s, such as *Days Of Our Lives*. She's still as beautiful and vivacious as she was in those other hospital episodes. She has some on-set photos of the film being made, and she still has the doctor's lab smock she wears during a key scene in the film. I asked her to give us a formal statement about working in this last Andy Milligan film, and her remarks follow:

"Andy had seen my performance in *Venice Beach, CA* after he read the original story for *Surgikill*. Sherman Hirsh wrote *Surgikill* and he wrote the part of Dr. Grace Goode with me in mind. When I met Andy he was filming *Monstrosity* on a seedy part of Hollywood Blvd. Someone didn't show up and Andy called and asked if I could help him out and do a small part where I would have my purse snatched in a car. Well, I almost got thrown out of the moving car! This wasn't supposed

to happen, but it looked good on film, and Andy kept it in.

"I liked Andy and we got along well. He was energetic, well educated, and seemed to know how everything should be done in films. He did many things himself, including make-up, set decoration, lighting, wardrobe, props, and so on. Even when he had help, he felt he could do it quicker and better. I was impressed by his knowledge and abilities. I mentioned that I was in Al Adamson's *Blood of Dracula's Castle*, which Andy had seen. He knew many of Al's films.

"When production of *Surgikill* began, we were shooting in a bankrupt medical center in a bad part of Los Angeles, and I'd have to be careful where I parked and look around to make sure nobody was following me to the set.

Andy was an actor's director. All the actors and crew were impressed and felt it was a great honor working with him. He got good performances out of everyone. He would rehearse until he felt the scene was right, then shoot, usually in one take. I remember the most was four takes, and that was very rare. Occasionally he turned into a tyrant on the set, but that was also rare.

"I enjoyed working with Andy and it's sad the way his last days ended. He was a talent that many fans of underground film will miss. We were planning to do another movie together, and he was hoping to become more



established in Hollywood. His early death at age 62 spelled the end for some exciting projects he had in mind. The mission of producer Van Harlingen and myself is now to bring Andy's final film to his many fans on video."

Through special arrangement with the producers, *Cult Movies* readers can secure a beautiful, colorfully boxed, VHS video of this outrageous medical horror-comedy from Milligan, the master of unusual cinema. You can have your copy autographed to you personally by starring actress Bouvier, Dr. Goode in *Surgikill*. To order send \$29.95 (plus \$3.00 shipping) to:

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